

The Waste Book: Detaching From the Structures of the Self

Joseph PIERSON

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Note to the examiners: Part One of *The Waste Book* (pp. 21-89 of this thesis) was submitted as part of an MA Dissertation and is not for assessment. It is included here for continuity.

Kingston University
School of Art
Creative Writing Department

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Abstract

This thesis comprises a novel, *The Waste Book (TWB)*, and an accompanying critical thesis, which identifies and interrogates the novel's motivating philosophical ambitions.

TWB follows Katherine Goss through her end-days drinking and into recovery. While in treatment, Katherine's friends and carers encourage her to identify with a story of herself that will allow her to challenge her old behaviours and be a different person going forward. The thesis considers Katherine's resistance to therapy as an instinctive detachment from the structures of the self and contextualises Katherine's detachment from these structures within theory at the intersection of philosophy of mind and cognitive science, with an emphasis on work by Damasio (1995; 2000), Metzinger (2004; 2009; 2014) and Zahavi (2007; 2015). The structural nature of the self is further analysed within a network of literary influences that similarly attempt to attack, deconstruct and detach from the self concept, including novels by Dostoevsky and Lispector, with an emphasis on *The Passion According to G.H.*¹ I contrast the didactic efforts of these novels, and their protagonists' fraught psychological struggles with the self, with the way Katherine persistently fixates upon the simple fact that she exists but sees no need to integrate this realisation into broader – narrative – structures. She thereby represents a sense of 'narrative detachment', a theory contextualised within narrative conceptions of the self, including frameworks outlined by Strawson (2004, 2007). The thesis further suggests *TWB*'s minimalist aesthetic exaggerates Katherine's detachment from the self, while facilitating a commitment to an objective reality *as it is*, rather than as it is experienced by a subject; a distinction which positions *TWB* as ideologically opposed to a Modernist emphasis on subjective experience. This commitment is considered alongside Meillassoux's 'correlationsim' (2012; 2014) and the Kantian Idealism to which it responds. Throughout, the critical thesis stresses the ambiguities at the heart of *TWB* and poses the question, is Katherine detached and therefore *free*, or simply aimless and lost?

¹ Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G. H.*, tans. by Idra Novey (London: Penguin, 2012)

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i. Introduction

This introduction offers a broad overview of the thesis' major aims and outlines the essay's methodology. It begins with a short summary of the creative project. The introduction is followed by a subsection, which further clarifies these aims and reformulates them as research questions. These sections serve to orientate the reader and explicitly signpost the thesis's intentions. This is followed by a brief overview of each of the chapters.

Clarice Lispector's novel, *The Passion According to G.H.* (hereafter, *The Passion*), and my own novel, *The Waste Book* (hereafter, *TWB*) are cited with in-text brackets. All other sources are cited in footnotes. Unless indicated by the comment 'emphasis added,' any italicised references are italicised within the text cited.

...

TWB is divided into three parts, and the chapters move back and forth between two timelines. In the first, Katherine Goss has lost another pub job, dropped out of school, and is drinking heavily in a B&B room in east London. In the second timeline, set approximately one year later, Katherine gets sober in a detox centre, moves into a residential rehab in Kent, and starts piecing her life together. She gets a job in a gallery in central London and has some success with a novel she has been writing. The earlier timeline shows her trying, unsuccessfully, to get sober, before she and her friend, Joe, visit a drug dealer, attack him, steal his money, and scatter. Katherine ends up back where she started, a B&B in east London, and as the implications of this attack – she is arrested and bailed pending trial – interrupt the story of her slow recovery, Katherine's lack of attachment to her past seems to present her recovery in a decidedly precarious light. Katherine resists the therapeutic emphasis on confronting the story of her past that she can be a different person going

forward, though she examples, throughout both timelines, an unusual level of psychological and emotional contentment. The novel's final part brings the earlier timeline up to date with the latter, while the latter timeline ends with her mother's death and leaves the sustainability of her recovery an open question.

The thesis identifies two overarching philosophical ambitions motivating the creative project. The first, to present a protagonist who detaches from the structures of the self; the second, to employ a spare, minimalist prose to describe reality *as it is*, 'free from subjective intrusion, without the didactic hectoring of popular writing.'² It is the purpose of this thesis to exemplify, analyse, and contextualise those ambitions, before assessing the novel's success or otherwise in its attempt to achieve them.

TWB is characterised perhaps most markedly by its *lack* of philosophical or analytical commentary on the part of its third-person narrator or through access to Katherine's thought processes. Chapter one considers this decision to avoid overt theorising from within the text and considers the novel's minimalist stylistic strategy as a deliberate reflection of Katherine's detachment. A focus on this stylistic reductionism positions the novel's aesthetic in a literary context. While acknowledging the broadness of the term, the essay defines *TWB*'s minimalism as 'an impulse towards economy of style,'³ and suggests that this strategy of stylistic reduction facilitates an eschewal of interiority, while the unadorned prose aims to present reality as it is *to itself*, rather than as it is experienced by a subject, a distinction which positions *TWB* as ideologically opposed to a Modernist emphasis on subjective experience. The essay considers this stylistic strategy with reference to a range of broadly 'minimalist' literatures, including the Dirty Realism of certain contemporary American fictions and, in

² John Biguenet, 'Notes of a Disaffected Reader: The Origins of Minimalism' in, *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 / 2 (1985) pp. 40-45 p. 40 Hereafter, *Biguenet*

³ Warren Motte, *Small Worlds: Minimalism in Contemporary French Literature* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) p. 1 Hereafter, *Motte*

chapter three, the ‘objective’ prose of Robbe-Grillet.

The thesis introduces Lispector’s *The Passion* and a series of Dostoevsky novels as *TWB*’s major literary influences, making clear that *TWB*’s characteristic stylistic economy is radically different to the experimentation of Lispector and the wrought, pacing, polyphonic nature of Dostoevsky’s fictions, but that these writers are partly motivated by a philosophical commitment to attacking and deconstructing the notion of a coherent self. *TWB*’s dominant influences, then, are philosophical rather than stylistic. Each of the essay’s major chapters turn to these influences in order to clarify and interrogate *TWB*’s philosophical ambitions. The lack of anguish Katherine demonstrates while presenting a detachment from the self contrasts sharply with the fraught psychological struggles that dominate the Lispector and Dostoevsky novels under discussion. Katherine begins from a place of detachment that those other protagonists never manage to attain. *TWB* was highly influenced by those texts, but it does not repeat their experiments; instead, it aims to start where they leave off. While Lispector and Dostoevsky present and interrogate the philosophical problems inherent in any attempt to detach from the self, *TWB* uses its minimalist aesthetic to demonstrate Katherine’s detachment, rather than arguing for it from within the text.

As a result of this decision to eschew commentary within the novel, the chapters that follow are tasked with interrogating the novel’s central aims with an academic rigour that is obviously absent from the novel itself, thereby clarifying *TWB*’s philosophical intentions in a clear critical context. The thesis thereby affords both myself and my reader a clearer understanding of the philosophical implications inherent in those ideas motivating my creative work, implications that the novel itself rarely addresses. In this way, the thesis serves a double function. It provides a philosophical and analytical context to elucidate *TWB*’s motivations, while it simultaneously clarifies those motivations to myself, motivations which were oblique and intuitive while I was drafting the novel, but which clarified as the thesis

took shape. The two projects – the novel and the analysis of it – are inextricably bound together through the aims outlined in this summary.

In clarifying Katherine's detachment from the structures of the self, the thesis first distinguishes between the self as the locus of experience – the experiential subject – and the self concept; the broader explanatory structure which contextualises a subject's experiences. The thesis analyses *TWB*'s first philosophical motivation within an interdisciplinary critical context that clarifies that aim. To this end, chapters one and two traverse theory at the intersection of philosophy of mind and cognitive science, with an emphasis on work by Damasio (1995; 2000), Metzinger (2004; 2010; 2014) and Zahavi (2007). The distinction between self and self-concept is borrowed from frameworks developed by Damasio (1995, 2000) and Neisser (1998), as well as from the field of social psychology (Oyserman et al., 2012; Stets and Burke, 2000), and contextualised within narrative theories of the self (Bruner, 1992; Schechtman, 2013). Katherine's detachment from the storied structures which compel a coherent self-concept to develop is fruitfully contextualised, in chapter two, within Strawson's (2004; 2007) 'four types' schematic of the self. His Non-Narrative / Episodic self, a self which 'may simply lack any narrative tendency,'⁴ is used as an analytical framework through which to example Katherine's detachment.

The chapters foreground the influence of Lispector's *The Passion* and demonstrate the way that novel's protagonist attacks head-on those structures of the self the thesis seeks to clarify. Lispector attempts, however, to detach from the intersubjective structures scaffolding her self concept *and* the experiential self altogether, a project undermined by the text itself, as the self dissolved through these processes of detachment is reinstated by the novel's first person, retrospective account of that process; a paradoxical circularity the thesis finds typical

⁴ Galen Strawson, *Episodic Ethics* in, Daniel D. Hutto (ed.) *Narrative and Understanding Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 86 Hereafter, *Strawson, Ethics*

of Lispector's technique.

By positioning Lispector's novel within the interdisciplinary critical frameworks developed in chapters one and two, the thesis offers an original reading of that novel's ambitions, which simultaneously brings Katherine's detachment into sharp relief. Katherine emphasises the simple fact that she exists: 'she is here, and that's true,' (*TWB*, p. 45) and this emphasis frees her from the broader explanatory frameworks her friends and carers persistently encourage her to develop. She does not, however, attempt to dissolve the self altogether, and so she is spared the philosophical contradictions which mar G.H.'s attempt at detachment. The thesis demonstrates the way Lispector's novel plays out a detachment from the self to its logical extreme, attempting to detach from both the self and the self concept. The philosophical circularities this attempt inevitably entails marks that novel as a counterpoint to my own. *TWB* responds to Lispector's text with, in Katherine, an attitudinal detachment from the conceptual self that is restrained from an interrogation of the perspective through which that detachment occurs.

An analysis of Dostoevsky's characterisations of Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment*,⁵ Stavrogin from *Demons*,⁶ and the underground man from *Notes from Underground*⁷ serves a similar function within the essay, providing an analysis of characters whose detachment from the conceptual self is frustrated by a persistent attempt to account for the self left behind. Chapter two suggests that all three of these protagonists attempt to detach from the self concept, though all are then encouraged, in one way or another, to *account* for the self attempting this act of detachment, thereby reassembling a storied conception of the

⁵ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2007) Hereafter, *Dostoevsky, Crime and Punishment*

⁶ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 1994) Hereafter, *Dostoevsky, Demons*

⁷ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, trans. by Jessie Coulson (London: Penguin, 2003) Hereafter, *Dostoevsky, Notes*

self even as they attempt to dismantle same. Katherine, in effect, begins where these characters leave off; she resists any and all stories of herself. The fiercely interrogative nature of Dostoevsky's and Lispector's novels serve to thoroughly analyse the philosophical implications of a detachment that Katherine herself rarely scrutinises, and so the novels this essay considers provide a way to interrogate my own work in a rigorous critical and philosophical context, which context in turn illuminates the way these ideas developed during my writing of the novel.

TWB's second philosophical ambition – to describe reality *as it is*, free from the subjective interpretation of it – is discussed as a motivating intuition that is rarely interrogated, or even explicitly formulated, within *TWB* itself. Rather, the thesis suggests that it is the novel's minimalist prose style which attempts to achieve this ambition. This distinguishes *TWB*'s minimalist emphasis on reality as it is *to itself* from a Modernist emphasis on interiority, which privileges a rendering of reality as it is experienced by a subject. *TWB* abstracts subjective experience from its presentation of reality, and thereby seeks to preserve that reality undisturbed by the experiencing subject. Chapter three incorporates an analysis of *TWB* within a series of philosophical frameworks that test and interrogate that ambition. The thesis is thereby forced to confront the philosophical paradoxes that attend any attempt to describe or re-present an objective reality *as it is*, namely, that such an attempt is self-defeating. A description of reality positions that reality within the mind of the subject composing the description, thereby undermining its objective nature. Clarifying and interrogating this ambition necessarily leads the chapter to develop an ambitious precis of philosophical responses to Kantian Idealism, considering a Phenomenological response to the inaccessibility of an external reality (Husserl, 2012; Thompson, 2007), critiques of the Phenomenological method of inquiry (Sparrow, 2014), and John Searle's (2015) refutation of representational theories of perception. Kant (2004) posits the idea that an objective reality –

the *in-itself* – is forever beyond our reach, while Quentin Meillassoux (2012; 2014) characterises philosophical responses to this argument as ‘correlationist’, the view that everything a subject thinks, perceives, or posits is encapsulated by their own subjective experience, and therefore correlated with it. In chapter three, the thesis thereby shifts from a close analysis of my own text into the development of a series of philosophical frameworks that finally conclude that if one is pertaining to the ‘truth’ of an objective reality, one must stay silent about it. In short, a commitment to reality *as it is* is a commitment to silence.

The novel’s prose style attempts to render reality *as it is*, though the philosophical frameworks chapter three develops prove this to be an inevitable failure, and chapter three contrasts a critical response to this with Roland Barthes’ (2012) analysis of Robbe-Grillet’s ‘objective’ style, a style which attempts to present objects free from subjective, interpretive frameworks (Bogue, 1980). Chapter three argues that although *TWB*’s minimalist technique therefore fails to achieve its motivating aim, the minimalist prose style *does* enable me to demonstrate Katherine’s detachment from the broader structures of the self concept, and that Katherine’s ability to analyse and disengage from these structures represents an unusual freedom. This detachment enables Katherine to gesture towards an objective reality that, nonetheless, remains unreachable. The thesis finally suggests that the value *TWB* seems to place on an objective reality can be roughly quantified by Katherine’s remarkable serenity, even in the face of a dramatically chaotic lifestyle. Katherine’s attitude towards the world therefore rescues her from the existential frustrations that compel G.H. This serenity, however, offers the reader a profoundly ambiguous reading of Katherine, and much of the novel’s tension arises from this ambiguity: is Katherine detached and therefore *free*, or simply aimless and lost?

Katherine represents a detachment from the structures of the self that is facilitated by

a minimalist prose style even if, as the essay concludes, such a style can only – inevitably – fail in its ambition to present reality *as it is*.

ii. Aims and Research Questions

TWB was motivated by an attempt to present a protagonist, Katherine Goss, who detaches from the structures of the self. The essay aims to analyse and contextualise this ambition through critical frameworks developed at the intersection of philosophy of mind and cognitive science (Damasio, 1995; Metzinger, 2004, 2010, 2014; Zahavi, 2007, 2015).

Borrowing distinctions from Oyserman et al. (2012), chapter one distinguishes between ‘self’ and ‘self concept’, while chapter two performs a close analysis of my own novel in order to demonstrate Katherine’s detachment from the self concept. Katherine’s detachment is clarified through an analysis of Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion* within these critical frameworks, as well a series of Dostoevsky’s protagonists, thereby positioning these novelists as powerful influences on my own creative work and as a means to clarify the essay’s aims.

The thesis suggests that a minimalist prose style facilitates the attempt to render reality *as it is*, undistorted by a subjective interpretation of it. The thesis situates an analysis of this aim within theoretical frameworks outlined by Quentin Meillassoux (2012; 2014) and contextualises that framework within a brief overview of responses to Kantian Idealism. The philosophical problems inherent in attempting to describe an objective reality are clarified through an analysis of Lispector’s novel, *The Passion*, which emphasises the impossibility of such an attempt. While the thesis confronts the philosophical paradoxes inherent in the attempt to describe an objective reality, the chapters suggest that Katherine is nonetheless ‘rescued’ from the metaphysical anguish characterising Lispector’s text through her refusal to explicitly interrogate this philosophical ambition. The thesis suggests that although *TWB*’s

minimalist prose style inevitably fails to describe reality *as it is*, the characterisation of Katherine and her detachment from the structures of the conceptual self render her free in ways G.H. is never able to attain. Katherine's lack of theorising, then, saves her from the philosophical circularities that attend Lispector's attempt to apprehend that reality.

These aims can be reformulated as two broad research questions:

1. How does *TWB*'s protagonist, Katherine Goss, represent a detachment from the structures of the self?

This formulation of the essay's first aim facilitates a consideration of the way Katherine resists any attempt to reformulate the storied conception of herself that her friends and carers persistently encourage her to adopt. The thesis combines the theoretical frameworks differentiating between self and self concept with a close analysis of my own novel. Chapter one develops the theoretical frameworks necessary for addressing this question, while chapter two broadens the applicability of the distinction between self and self concept through its analysis of the narrative self. These frameworks are employed, in chapter two, as analytical tools with which to demonstrate Katherine's detachment, and the thesis clarifies the relative ease with which she achieves that detachment with an analysis of Dostoevsky's protagonists, whose inability to detach from the self concept offers a contrast to my own novel.

2. How does a minimalist prose style facilitate the attempt to describe reality *as it is*?

Answering this question forces the thesis to confront, in chapter three, the philosophical paradoxes inherent in any attempt to render reality in its objective nature. This leads the thesis to concede that a minimalist aesthetic is no better than any other in surmounting the 'correlationist' paradox outlined in chapter three. Chapter three nonetheless concludes that Katherine's detachment from the self concept enables her to appreciate and

gesture towards an objective reality, without explicitly interrogating her ability to behold that reality, and that in this way Katherine remains markedly ‘free.’

iii. Chapter Overview

Chapter one identifies *TWB*’s spare prose style as a reflection of Katherine’s refusal to analyse her own behaviour and suggests that this aesthetic corresponds to Katherine’s detachment from the structures of the self. This ‘minimalist’ aesthetic is considered in a literary context, with emphasis on Motte’s (1999) discussions of contemporary French literary fiction, as well as consideration of minimalism in the plastic arts, while acknowledging the broadness of the term *minimalism* (see Strickland, 1993). For the purposes of the thesis, *TWB*’s minimalism denotes a stylistic economy, a relatively unambitious lexis, and simple sentence structure, and these stylistic proclivities are motivated by the novel’s overarching philosophical ambitions. This minimalist aesthetic reflects Katherine’s detachment, while also facilitating a commitment to describing reality as it is to itself, rather than as it is experienced by a subject. Chapters one and two are devoted to contextualising and analysing the first of these ambitions, while the second is explored in chapter three.

The thesis considers a range of broadly minimalist fictions, including those associated with so-called Dirty Realism, a term Bill Buford (1983) uses to describe a loose movement in contemporary American fiction, which emphasises an inexpressive prose style and ‘downbeat’, working-class milieu. While acknowledging the stylistic similarities between my own work and other minimalist fictions, the chapter makes clear that the major literary influences dominating the following chapters are philosophical rather than stylistic. Clarice Lispector’s *The Passion* and a series of Dostoevsky novels are introduced as *TWB*’s major literary influences, making clear that although I am intuitively attracted to novelists who

employ a stripped-down, economical prose, such influences are relatively superficial without a firm philosophical grounding, and that it is Lispector and Dostoevsky who hereby provide that grounding. While acknowledging the obvious – and pronounced – differences in style, the essay argues that Lispector, Dostoevsky, and *TWB* are in one way or another devoted to a similar philosophical programme, centred around challenging the notion of the self. The works of theirs which dominate these chapters present a commitment to analysing and interrogating the structures of the self, and chapter one explains that Katherine was written largely in response to these interrogations.

Throughout her time in treatment, Katherine is encouraged to develop a sense of her own identity, towards which she can change her attitude. Section 1.3. suggests that Katherine's resistance to these stories of the self constitute her detachment from those orientating structures. Borrowing the distinction from social psychology (Oyserman et al., 2012; Stets and Burke, 2000), the thesis differentiates between 'self' as the subject of experience, and 'self concept' as the organisation of that subject through broader explanatory frameworks. This differentiates between the 'core' (Damasio, 1995; 2000), experiential, or 'ecological' (Neisser, 1998) self and the self concept, a distinction which crucially enables a consideration of Katherine's detachment from those structures that might otherwise constitute her coherent conceptual self.

1.4. suggests that Katherine's equivocal analyses regarding the causes of her behaviour frustrates the composition of a psychologically motivated fiction and proposes a schematic illustrating this idea: *What happens* (objective processes) influences *how a person feels about what happens* (the subjective experience of those processes), which influences *what happens next*. The thesis contends that this schematic broadly represents the way selves orientate socially and intersubjectively, as well as offering a blueprint for the way psychological fictions are structured. The chapter thereby synthesises frameworks developed

within philosophy of mind with a theory of the way psychological fictions are structured and illustrates the influence of the research on the creative decisions underlying the novel.

Katherine's detachment from this schematic is positioned as an attempt to frustrate the very narrative within which she exists.

Chapter one contrasts Katherine's detachment from the structures of the conceptual self with Clarice Lispector's attempt, in *The Passion*, to detach from both the conceptual self and the very subject of experience. *The Passion* is a retrospective account, told in the first person, of its protagonist's encounter with a dying cockroach. The protagonist, G.H., a well-to-do sculptress in Rio, finds a cockroach in her maid's bedroom. Horrified, she slams it in a wardrobe door and spends the rest of the novel contemplating its dying form. G.H. fixates on the cockroach's lack of self-consciousness and sees in its 'objective' nature a nearness to God. Through this process of fixation, G.H. attempts to inhabit the creature's objective nature, to dissolve her self-consciousness and transcend the self. By considering this attempt within a philosophy of mind context, the thesis concludes that any theoretical attempt to dissolve the self is frustrated by the self attempting that act of dissolution, a paradox echoed by Metzinger's (2004) insistence that even if his own and associated theories of the self are convincing, there is no way for you or I to fully believe them, as such a belief reinstates the very self such theories deny. 'This fact,' writes Metzinger, 'is the true essence and the deepest core of what we *actually* mean when speaking about the "puzzle"- or sometimes even about the "mystery"- of consciousness.'⁸ The chapter concludes by suggesting that while Katherine eludes those structures of the self concept that might otherwise compose her identity, G.H. attempts to go one further and dissolve the self altogether. Contrasting these aims clarifies Katherine's detachment, while the fiercely interrogative nature of Lispector's

⁸ Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004) p. 627 Hereafter, *Metzinger, No One*

text enables the thesis to illustrate the philosophical ambitions motivating my own creative work in a broader critical context.

Chapter two considers Damasio's (2005) suggestion that the self is 'the first answer to a question the organism never posed: To whom do these ongoing mental processes now unfolding belong?'⁹ As the subject answers that question (these experiences *belong to me*), 2.1. suggests that the 'I' is 'born' of an interpretive process, and the capacity to perform this act of interpretation compels the subject to look out at the world and organise its experiences within broader explanatory structures. Through considerations of the way the social milieu provides the basis for these structures (see Bruner, 2002, 2004; Fivush and Habermas et al., 2011), the chapter suggests that the instinct to organise the self in this way can be characterised as a *narrative instinct*. Narrative, because the capacity to infer a relationship between objects, ideas or events – a capacity generative of the 'I' – represents the foundational capacity for storytelling. Katherine's persistent refusal to integrate her experiences into broader social structures marks her detachment from the conceptual self and thereby frustrates the orientation of the self within broader explanatory frameworks. This is what accounts for the difficulty those around her have in *accounting* for Katherine's behaviour.

2.1. contextualises these insights within Strawson's (2004, 2007) 'four-types' schematic of the narrative self, allowing his formulation of a Non-Narrative, Episodic self to offer an interpretative key to Katherine's lack of engagement with the conceptual self and the narratives by which it could be expressed. This framework thereby further develops the distinction between self and self concept outlined in chapter one. By analysing the way

⁹ Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens* (London: Vintage, 2000) pp. 25-6 Hereafter, *Damasio, What Happens*

psychological motivations structuring identity, section 2.2. states that Katherine's lucid analysis of these structures enables her to detach from them, and goes on to propose that Dostoevsky's protagonists Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, and the underground man, can similarly be seen as attempts to attack, deconstruct, and detach from the self concept. This section uses analyses of those novels by, among others, Holquist (1977) and Corrigan (2017) in support of these ideas, and positions Dostoevsky's influence on the creative project as a way of clarifying Katherine's detachment. Katherine responds to the existential frustrations that pursue these protagonists by avoiding the need to account for her detachment. Lispector and Dostoevsky's protagonists commit themselves to these existential crises through their philosophical interrogations of themselves. Conversely, Katherine is saved from these crises through her refusal or inability to perform any such interrogations on herself. Katherine's lack of interest in the philosophical issues by which *TWB* is motivated 'rescues' her from the complications which inevitably attend those issues.

Chapter three returns to the ambition to present reality *as it is*. The thesis challenges my own commitment to an 'objective' prose style by suggesting that, in fact, even an emphasis on the 'objective' nature of reality is inevitably undermined by the very act of describing that reality. Whenever a subject thinks about, conceives of, or describes an objective reality, the subject makes that reality a correlate of its own thought. Meillassoux characterises this philosophical stance as 'correlationsim' (Meillassoux, 2012), and chapter three suggests that Lispector's fierce, philosophical interrogations commit her to it, thus undermining G.H.'s attempt to introspect *beyond* subjectivity to the objective reality which exceeds it. Lispector's profoundly philosophical novel, then, is combined with a critical framework that answers *TWB*'s attempt to re-present reality in its objective nature and suggests that such an attempt is impossible. This presents Lispector's text within a critical context which, once again, clarifies the philosophical intuitions compelling my own novel.

3.3. then considers Lispector's earlier novels, particularly her debut, *Near to the Wild Heart* (2012), as demonstrating a psychological detachment from the intersubjective structures Katherine likewise resists. Through its insistence on a version of correlationism, *The Passion*, in effect, undermines the spiritual freedom Lispector celebrates in earlier work. Those earlier protagonists demonstrate an awareness of an objective reality that is not undermined by an interrogation of its ungraspable status. Like *TWB*, Lispector's earlier novels are saved from the existential angst that characterises *The Passion* for their lack of philosophical rigour. Although these ideas were only fully developed and contextualised while writing the thesis itself, Katherine nonetheless intuitively reaches such a conclusion when reflecting on her own creative process:

The trees in the garden, the hands on the clock-face, her dull reflection in the burnished steel of the kettle – everything is so clearly itself and nothing else that it takes her breath away. What is there to say when everything is already so clearly itself? (*TWB*, p. 79)

Chapter three concedes that any commitment to a description of reality *as it is* is a commitment to silence, as any description of that reality turns it into something it was not. As Lispector frames this impossible endeavour, 'How to speak to you if there is a silence when I get it right?' (*The Passion*, p. 148). *TWB* is not a silence, and so, just like the novels Katherine reads, with every gesture it makes it moves further from its stated aims. These ideas are further contextualised by an analysis of the influence of Robbe-Grillet on my own work, a novelist whose 'objective' style (see Barthes, 2012) likewise attempts to abstract *things* from an interpretation of them, but whose project nonetheless fails for the same reasons outlined above.

The chapter concludes by stating that *TWB* is yet 'rescued' from these metaphysical pitfalls by Katherine's refusal to explicitly interrogate the philosophical implications of attaining to an objective reality. Although conceding that a minimalist prose style *cannot*

describe reality *as it is*, the thesis makes clear that *TWB* responds to a tendency to psychologise fiction, and itself recoils towards a minimalist aesthetic that attempts to simply show things as they are, despite the philosophical complications that inevitably attend this endeavour.

Together, the chapters perform an interdisciplinary analysis of my novel's overarching aims, highlighting Katherine's detachment from the structures of the self concept through an analysis of those texts which most powerfully influenced my creative work. These analyses are synthesised through the employment of a series of theoretical frameworks that help to clarify *TWB*'s motivations. In this way, the thesis offers an original context in which to consider Lispector's *The Passion* and a series of Dostoevsky novels, which contexts in turn clarify the philosophical impetus motivating *TWB*.

The Waste Book

Part One

1.

She falls over in the bath and has to pull the cord. Patsy knocks on her bedroom door, lets herself in, calls out her name – “Katherine?” – and stops in the bathroom doorway. Katherine puts out her arms. “I fell,” she says.

Patsy shuts off the taps and drags her from the bath. She tries to make Katherine stand but her legs won’t hold, she crumples and Patsy lowers her to the floor, gives her a towel and cracks the window. She sits on the loo and lights a cigarette. “Stay there for a bit,” she says. “Get your breath back.”

After a while she helps Katherine to stand. She wipes her dry with a hand-towel and they get her dressed. K. leans against her as they make their way to the cafeteria.

“You know what this is,” says Patsy. “With your legs.”

“No,” says K. “I’ve had it before, I think.”

“You think?”

“Yes.”

“Peripheral neuropathy,” says Pats. “Alcoholic neuropathy, they call it. It gets better,” she says. “But after a while, you keep at it, sometimes it doesn’t get better and you end up in a wheelchair. You get numb fingers and toes?”

“Yes,” says K.

“Yeah,” says Pats. “Eat your dinner.”

...

Patrick puts out a hand, palm down. “You,” he says. “The same.”

There is a clock on the back wall. Katherine is seated. She stands. She puts out her hand and they watch her fingers tremble.

“Still wobbly,” he says. “How’d you feel?”

“Yes,” she says. “A bit wobbly.”

He takes a bottle of pills from the cabinet beside them and shakes three into the palm of her hand. She closes her fist. She removes her other hand from the desk, falters, says, “It’s okay. I can manage.”

She does manage. She leans a shoulder against the wall and slopes along the corridor. She pauses in the big open doorway and watches Ray setting up the pool table. “Ray,” she says.

Twenty-three, just back from Afghanistan. Nine litres of White Lightning a day. He leans, slides the cue a few times and then shatters the pattern. The balls scatter. He straightens up.

“Miss Goss,” he says. “Meds?”

She nods.

He props the cue against the wall and she pushes herself off from the frame and stands free, wobbling a little as he passes. There’s no one here. The end of the room is all glass, the

garden beyond. It must be the afternoon. She tries to recall the time showing on the clock in the meds room. She steps cautiously into the room, staggers, her knees give, her palms hit the ground and she is on the floor. She sits here a moment, surprised by herself. The room is as it was. She pulls herself up on the edge of the pool table, holds the wall and then – angled, leaning – she slopes to the patio doors, slides one open and steps outside.

It is easier to crawl and so she crawls across the patio and pulls herself up onto the picnic bench. A plastic cup of water on the table, a folded *Metro*. She palms the sweaty pills, drinks the tepid water and swallows the taste or the memory of the taste of Paracetamol. The afternoon is fading though the light hasn't changed, the light has always been like this, she thinks.

You're confused, Katherine.

She rests into her name. Above the rooftops an oblique cone of cloud twists from the apex of Canada Square and a moon in one corner, full, pale, purifies the clean blue sky. Poplar, east London. She is thoughtless for a while. It's very comfortable.

Kevin steps out wrapped in his tatty dressing gown. He gives Katherine her phone and she puts it on the table and presses her hands between her thighs. She closes her eyes and swoons gently, a little tip of vertigo.

"Okay?" she says.

Kevin drags a plastic chair across the lawn, coughs, spits thickly beside himself and shivers.

Patsy brings out a pint-sized Thermos. "Soup," she says. She squeezes Kevin's shoulder. "Try and get some of that down you." She lights a cigarette then passes them round.

They smoke and Patsy says, "You making a call, Kaffrin?"

Katherine nods. She is going to make a call. She holds the phone between her thighs, looks out over the garden and loses herself there for a while. She texts Joe. Nothing comes back. It's quiet. Patsy scrubs her cigarette dead on the sole of her shoe and tosses it in the bin. "Don't get cold," she says.

...

The beggars prostrate themselves, caps extended.
Get up, she thinks. You are children of God; you do not
crawl before anyone.

...

She realises she is standing and when she realises this she remembers walking from her room to here, though she didn't remember it at the time. She feels like she was somewhere else. She was. She signed on at the police station every day until she was exempted. She whispers to herself, "You are very sick, Katherine."

It's difficult to walk. Alcoholic neuropathy, says Pats. It is hard to convince herself she is here, so she opens the patio doors and steps outside. Her legs are fine. There was nothing wrong with them. She walks fluently across the grass in her pants and a t-shirt and the night's stillness moves across her, as fluent and weightless as her limbs. She has been here before. She stood on this lawn, sober, clear, and then she was on the platform at Poplar DLR, the sky blue, her soul raw, as though her blood were a current she could not contain. She wavered within herself, frightened, breathless.

...

The flat counterpane. A crossed window. The wall scorched
around the plug socket.

...

Ray plays aggressively, closes her down in minutes and before she can capitulate he's already reforming the board.

"Again," he says.

He talks a lot about hell.

Dani and Ian flirt on the couch beside them. Ray sits back, gives a tight nod, ending the game, then he stands, hitches his jeans, paces the living area a bit and sets up the pool table. She listens to the balls clacking, to Ray circling the table in his slippers, to Vicky and Ian telling stories from back in the day. Dani was kidnapped and tortured by an ex-boyfriend. She puts her hair behind her ear and turns her head, exposing to Ian then to K. a jagged white scar on the side of her neck. "Fucker put acid on me," she says.

Ian kisses his teeth. K. strokes the scars on her wrists, shiny and purplish. The rain intensifies. There's a low rumble of thunder.

"You been round before," says Dani.

"Yes," says Katherine. "I've been here before."

They've been talking about death, about overdoses, so she says, "Is Kevin okay?"

"He left, Katherine. You don't remember?"

"Yes," she says. "I remember."

2.

An expanse of waste ground out back. A patch of dusty concrete, some grass overcome with weeds. Katherine sits against the low side wall, some rubbish scattered about. A blue lighter with a snapped head, a few broken crayons by her feet. She leans forward and wipes a piece of yellow crayon across the dusty concrete. She draws a window then tosses the crayon aside and hugs her knees. She skims her fingers over the drawing and smiles to herself.

It's hot again. Stratford, east London. It's late-July. She drinks from a warm beer. Birds put bright noises here and there. Traffic sounds. The sky is a very pure and pale blue with a pale full moon in one corner.

Some kids come out of the fire exit. There's an orange tricycle against the wall with a standing board but no saddle. The two boys grab it, one stands on and the other pushes him along the back of the hotel. The little Asian girl walks up as far as the grass nodding her head side to side. She sings, "Incy a-wincy spy-da climb up a water spout..."

Katherine watches them play. A white admiral makes stuttering U-shapes across the yard. The girl shoots out a hand and says, "A butterfly!"

She takes her beer back to the room. The sound of the kids playing spirals through the open window. She stands still in the middle of the room thinking not much. Above the bed someone has written with a pencil in big letters, *I'ma pick up da world and drop it on your fucking head.*

There's a blue carrier bag of beers on the floor and Katherine finishes the can in her hand and opens another as she sits on the bed and crosses her ankles. Her mind irises closed and when it opens out again she feels as though she's been asleep but she hasn't, she's just been sitting here. She drinks long from the can, sets it on the windowsill and lies down,

pulling her knees close, folding her bones. A smattering of grey handprints on the ceiling reminds her of a police cell and then her thoughts are quiet and still. She feels as though she could walk barefoot through them. She sleeps.

...

Ivana, Prague:

She gestures towards the window. There, she says. Blood all up the glass. The walls. They have a splatter expert. Did you know that? What happened when, according to where the blood is, how it fell, how it was projected.

...

The afternoon light is soft and yellow. Her bowels feel slack. She smells sour. A 14" Philips TV sits on a pine dining chair beside the bed. She turns on the television and stares at the muted news for a while. She saw the word *shower* written on the wall or the side of a staircase at some point yesterday or the day before but she can't be bothered to explore.

Sharpen up.

She turns off the television, puts on her blazer and tucks in her shirt. She secures her hair into a ponytail with the elastic band from her wrist, stamps her feet into her tan leather boots. She drinks, tries to make a cigarette, flexes her fingers and then tries again. She smokes and looks at the sunlit greasy smears on the window. She loses herself. Her phone rings, an old Samsung flip-phone. She opens it. Her father. She watches it ring, doesn't feel one way or another about it, answers.

"Katherine?"

"Yes."

"Have you heard? About Joe? He's been stabbed. He's in the hospital."

Pause.

“Katherine?”

“Where?” she says.

“He’s in the hospital, in Colchester.”

“Where was he stabbed?”

“He was at his dad’s, last night.”

“Will he die?”

“No, he’s not going to die. Are you okay?”

“Yes.”

There’s a long pause. Katherine’s father rearranges his breathing, an exaggerated sigh, and then, through the quiet, the pause, something opens up between them. Her father feels it and says, “You’ve left the pub.”

“Yes,” says Katherine, “I’ve left.”

“Are you coming home?”

“I’m going to Russia.”

“Russia?”

“I don’t know,” she says. “How’s mum?”

...

Katherine looks where she gestures. It's true, there's almost a body.

...

Her hip aches sharply with each step and she's limping to try and ease it. She steadies herself against the wall of the church but when she pushes off her legs give out and she stumbles and lets herself drop to her knees. Her bones feel heavy. People walk past. Someone puts a hand by her eyes. She waves it away and her voice spills out like bad milk, "No, s'alright."

She buys a cold can of Holsten Pils and a tight green apple at the end of the Romford Road. She walks beside the church on Broadway, steps over the low chain and sits on the stone steps of a war memorial. She chews a mouthful of apple then dribbles the pulp by her hip. She can hear the guy out front Starbucks saying, "Jee-zahs die for ah-sin," in a low monotonal loop.

She looks up at the sky, a precise, even blue. Her thoughts blank out and then the image of her friend lying on the kitchen floor with blood spread under him slants through her like vertigo. She jolts to. She holds the can between her knees, enjoying its satisfying weight, the scruffy charm of Stratford simmering in the sunshine.

...

She steals four boxes of Paracetamol and a packet of throwaway razors from Wilko's and pays for a Mars bar. She eats some of it and throws the rest away.

At the Wetherspoons she nods hello to the boys on the couches and they nod back or raise a hand. The pub's quiet. Roy sucks the foam from a fresh Guinness then touches the end of his flat-cap. "Watcha, girl."

“Hello, Roy.”

“Drink?”

Natalie puts her phone down and turns to the bar and Katherine smiles hello and orders a pint with lime. She leaves Roy to pay, takes her drink to the garden out back and sits at a table shaded by a wonky Heineken parasol. She takes out her phone then closes it and drinks half her pint. She pushes a spent match through a wet ring of beer then stands and walks quickly back to the bar. She orders a curry and waits for it in the garden. She eats methodically then goes through to the toilets, fingers her throat and ejects the food in big hot handfuls. She vomits until it's thin, her stomach dry and tight. She wipes her fingers and her wrist, stands at the sink and puts cold water on her face. Her eyes turn a fierce, blood-shocked green when she vomits. Her lip quivers. She calms herself.

She has a couple at the bar with Roy. She likes the old boys, their children off and away, growing into their resentments, she thinks, as the fathers stand singly at the bar, diligently smothering their guilt, a look on their faces, as though they are on pause.

She loads up with beers from Millennium Food and Wine and buys real cigarettes and sits on the wall beside the Salvation Army. A scruffy pigeon gimps about on the forecourt, jabbing at a pile of bent chips. Some kids cycle past on BMX bikes and the last kid stops, pinches the front of his shirt, looks down and says, “Oh mar gosh, man-dem spat on me!”

She smiles, sticks her can in the top of a stuffed recycle bin and walks down to the Reform Church. She goes through the garden gate into the yard, the blue double doors closed, the transom dim. Down one side of the church there's a narrow strip of grass before the railing, a line of roses inside the fence. She sits with her back against the church, the bushes

more or less obscuring her from the road. The roses are white, the petals are frail, papery, edged in brown. Dog roses. They nod like dogs.

She breathes deeply. Maryland, mostly, but under it, clean, the white perfume of the roses, clear as a razor cut. She closes her eyes and almost immediately slips into sleep, the church at her back, then bounces out again. She lies down on the dry grass. It feels nice to be lying here. She sleeps and dreams and she wakes startled by something that's no longer there. The day moves around her. Windscreens flash past, exposing their songs. Drunk, still-sleepy, something almost clarifies to a point and then fades.

3.

Figure 1.

What happens; how she feels.

Describing the trajectory of *her*.

...

They roll slowly down the incline and park on the drive. John cuts the engine.

“Ready?”

She nods. They sit here a moment. He flicks a finger away from the wheel. “The offices,” he says.

It’s November, full of rain and floods. Beyond the offices there’s a big house in black rafters with a slate roof, naked flowerbeds around the front. The driveway carries on past it and slopes down to a second house, huge, a mansion or an estate, with peeling colonnades in front.

“Is that it?”

“That’s the house,” says John. “You’ll be in the barn. Both projects are Kenward, but we look after you. They have their own people.”

It’s quiet for a while and then she says okay and opens the doors.

“Katherine,” he says. “Do you pray?”

He’s a big man, softly spoken. She imagines him kneeling, hands together, head bowed. The countryside is very still and quiet, the windows open. She smiles at him. She blinks slowly and he blinks slowly as well. They are like cats. They get out. The office door

opens and a woman with cropped hair and a red print dress steps out onto the gravel, extending a hand early, saying her name. Katherine steps forward and shakes her hand.

“Christine,” says the woman.

John unloads the boot and takes her bags inside. There is a paddock in front of the office, a black pony standing by the gate.

Christine says, “I’m going to make you some tea, Katherine. Have a bit of a wander and come back to the office when you’re ready.”

John stands next to Christine with his arms folded and they look at her, their smiles wincing in the hard sunlight. They look like parents. She walks to the paddock and holds the top rung of the steel gate. From somewhere close by there’s the soft bleating of goats. She’s tired. Her legs feel fine but there is an emptiness in her limbs, she feels weightless, as if she moved her hand it would float away. The fields beyond the paddock are flooded, flat glassy pools reflecting the blue sky. The pony comes close, snorts, noses the muddy smear across the gate’s middle rung. She touches his ear and he turns away and trots across the field.

...

They fill out some paperwork and when they’re done Katherine starts crying. Christine sits in her high-backed wicker chair with her hands in her lap waiting for it to finish. Katherine is worn out, she weeps, her organism – she – has been through a lot.

“Shall we feed the goats?” says Christine.

K. stands by the fence and a grubby Billy goat comes close and mouths the wire. Christine strokes its nose with her thumb.

Blessed.

“Your keyworker has fourteen weeks’ funding for you. And after that we can see about getting you into a second-stage.”

She puts her hand on the fence and the goat is there and she strokes its nose. She lets herself cry for a while. Christine puts an arm around her.

...

Graham takes her down to the house. They go in through a laundry room, follow a flagstone corridor to the kitchens and a guy in chef whites hefts a cool box onto the side and slaps its top.

“Tea for two,” he says.

She leaves Graham to sign the paper and she follows the corridor to a huge dining room, the beige paint cracked, a very elaborate chandelier hanging from the ceiling, the bulbs dull. Cello music from a radio somewhere. The guests or inmates are sitting to dinner at two parallel rows of tables. Murky oil paintings watch over them. She thinks of the breakfast room at the B&B. It is as though the two moments have been spliced together and everything in between them evaporates. She watches them for a while then Graham whistles and she turns, catching herself partway through the thought or belief that it might be her father standing in the doorway.

She unpacks the dishes while he sets the table. He puts cutlery round the right way and folds two paper napkins into triangles. They sit opposite one another, the curtains drawn, Classic FM on the radio. She washes the dishes. He sits in the front room with the newspaper and she goes up to the bathroom on the first floor. It’s cold, the ceiling slopes. She fingers her throat and quietly vomits then she wipes the viscous saliva from her hands, flushes, wipes the toilet down and washes at the sink. She looks at herself.

...

“The staff go for the weekend,” she says.

“Yes,” he says. “Just us. I can nip into Tunbridge Wells if you need anything, but you’re on lock-down for the first couple of weeks. We’ll have new recruits soon.”

She lingers in the doorway then she sits on the couch and he tosses the paper aside. He tells her about what he’s just read, pulling the story apart, exposing its bias, its clumsiness.

“Do you miss it?” she asks.

“I can’t go back to the papers,” he says. “It’s.”

Pause.

“But what can you do?” he says. “You’re meeting someone in town or you’re out in Tunbridge Wells for the weekend and it’s raining. You’ve an hour before the train and there’s a pub across the road, the lights low, a few old boys at their places. What do you do?”

“I don’t know,” she says. “Starbucks?”

He goes to bed early and she sits in the dining room. There’s a diary on a low table just inside the door. She turns the pages back to October thirteen and pencils an asterisk at the top corner of the page then she turns the pages forward, past today, on until January twenty-first and there she writes, shakily, *100 days, Katherine*. She looks at it for a moment. Long-term sobriety doesn’t fit in her head. She imagines turning the page and seeing the message and communing with this moment, with the person she is now but won’t be. She wonders, for a moment, where she is, and in the attempt to locate herself she loses herself. It is very easy. She stands here like this. She is standing here like this, then she lets it go, the line she has

written loses all meaning and for that reason she is pleased with it. She looks at her hands and laughs, surprised. The fact of them – her hands – don't seem commensurate to how strange it is that she is here. There is not much to do but go to bed, which she does. She listens to the barn swell and creak in the wind. She remembers it's her birthday, that she's twenty-five. She looks at the digital clock on her nightstand. 00:02.

“Yesterday,” she says.

4.

Like two children playing next to but not with each other in the playground.

The film cannot read its own characters.

...

She has come too far. She re-orientates herself, doubles-back and comes onto the forecourt talking quietly to herself. The boy tips his BMX, turning a slow circle in front of her. He stops by his mate, nods to her, says, "You back, yeah."

She's seen him around. The light's blueing and streetlamps needle the sky. He spits neatly through his teeth, his top bare, a bright red t-shirt flagging from the back pocket of his jeans. "Dennis," he says.

She nods.

The Indian guy is standing behind the desk turning the pages of a *LOOT*.

"I forgot to pay," she says. "I need to pay for tonight."

The man sucks the yellow fringe of his moustache. "Good job I kept your room, hey? Forty pounds, my dear."

The bike clatters to the ground outside and she drops the roll of money as the boy steps into the lobby swinging his arms. "Dropped something," he says.

She picks it up, the boy eyes her and the Indian gives her a wink. She pays and the two men watch her as she leaves. She wants to feel clear, clearer than she feels. It is hard to drink off the shakes and the weakness in her limbs without becoming so drunk that she tips the other way. Hard to find the balance anymore.

She sets her bag under the work-surface and looks at the room, the flat counterpane, a crossed window, the wall scorched around the plug socket. Someone before her has left a saucepan on the work surface, a white dinner plate angled against it. She shifts up the window, flaps the duvet and smooths it flat, unloosing the airy scent of detergent. At the end of the sideboard, just inside the door, there's a white sink surrounded by a patch of grey tiles with filth in the grouting, a small cracked mirror above the taps. She drinks some water and washes her face and squats by her bag, takes out the beers and some makeup and the pills and razors and she sits on the bed. She begins popping the Paracetamol free and puddling them by her hip but it's a fiddly job and she stops and smokes a cigarette and chews some Gaviscon tablets.

...

Further, it does not occur to the language of the film that this reading is expected of it.

And yet it proceeds.

The film *does* happen.

...

There's a mildewed packing crate in the stall. The concertina door is jammed open and the showerhead leans against the tiles, its neck broken. Warm water sketches dribbly lines down the wall. She presses herself against the tiles. She uses the bottle of Gillette shower gel she found in the room, wipes a razor over her legs and under her arms and then tries to snap the blade free but the plastic's too strong, it bends, so she uses her teeth and tucks the blade in her pocket. She hand-towel seatbelts as she jerks the limp blue cloth and the roller inside comes free, untangles itself and clatters to the floor. She picks up the roller, a tube of black plastic with a heavy steel bracket at one end. She takes it with her back to the room.

She's run out of clean underwear so she washes out her snotty pants, drapes them over the radiator and pulls on her jeans. The last of her clean socks, a white vest. She soaps her hands and scratches at the little sun of nicotine on the side of her finger until it is raw and pink.

Someone knocks three times on the door. She watches herself cock her head.

"Come in," she says.

The door opens.

"Hello, Dennis."

"Hey," he says. "I come in?"

She backs up a little. He opens the door. His red t-shirt says, *What's My Name?* in big white letters. He's holding one hand behind his back and then he brings that hand out and opens it a little, showing her the small paring knife he's brought. Katherine nods her head.

She takes the TV off the dining chair, sets it under the window, sits on the bed and reaches for the beer at her ankle. There isn't one there. The boy shrugs and walks over and sits down.

Her stomach loosens. She smiles. He rubs his spare hand across the top of his close-cropped hair. He is her age, maybe. He sits with his knees wide, hands in his lap.

She wants a beer but doesn't get one. They're quiet for long enough that she forgets there is a reason he is here.

"You've got money," he says.

He swallows and shifts in his seat. He is losing his nerve. She wants to lean across and put a hand on his knee.

“Let me put it this way,” he says.

She stands abruptly and he raises the knife, “Hey!”

“I’m getting some water,” she says.

She drinks from the tap. Adrenaline cautiously loosens the backs of her knees. Poised, the moment pliable, expectant. She commits herself to it, picks up the dinner plate, right hand, and the saucepan with her left. He begins to raise his hands, he half-stands, and she holds the plate near his face and strikes the pan against it. The plate smashes. A fragment glances the side of his head, a tight flash of blood. She swings the pan and smacks him full in the face. His nose bursts, his head snaps back and he lands in the chair. His head dips forward and he says, “Ah!” and a face full of blood falls into his lap. He propels himself forward, his arms around Katherine’s waist, and her back hits the edge of the bed base as she goes down, dropping the pan. She heels herself back against the side of the bed, trapping his hands there, his hot bloody face on her shoulder. As he pulls his hand free he whips the knife across her left arm and then hits her at the ribs, hard. She reaches across his slippery head and closes her fist around his ear, pulling his throat to her mouth. She squashes her blunt teeth closed on his neck. He jerks back and her teeth clamp down on her tongue and her knee shoots up and sockets into his groin. She smashes the heel of her palm into his jaw and his temple and his eye and pulls herself up and out from under him, her hand blindly finding the roller, which she brings down swiftly across the top of his head, the sharp bracket breaking his scalp. She stamps on the back of his neck then stamps on his fingers and swings her heel forward, cuffing him hard in the temple and reeling backwards herself. She drops the roller and falls down, her breath rasping and bloody.

She looks at the top of her left arm. It's bloody there. She lifts her shirt and her ribs are shockingly tender but she has not been stabbed. The boy turns onto his back. He's moaning. He spits blood through his teeth and whines, his hands hovering by his head, fingers blueing, eyes shut tight. Her ribs double her breath with a sharp wince. A cool thread of blood runs down her arm. She picks up a can and gets it open but the gas accelerates and she sucks a mouthful then tosses the can at the sink. Foam spurts up the tiles. She squashes her feet into her boots, puts on her blazer and holds it closed with a fist. She shoulders up her satchel and leaves the room.

She walks swiftly through the lobby. The boy's friend is standing just inside the door and she walks right past him and out to the gaspingly warm night. The full moon is astonishing. Dirty orange streetlamps smudge the sky.

She walks into the off-licence sucking the blood from a pound coin. She holds a cold can aloft and a kid shifting sacks of rice at the back gives her a nod.

She sits on the brick wall out front Iceland. She bursts open her can, puts her head back and blows smoke.

5.

Innocence:

She parks on the raked gravel driveway, opens both doors and turns off the engine. The castle white, neat, a neat flat bay. She unravels the foil and eats the sandwich she's brought.

...

Each morning she hands their diaries in at the office. She writes about the goats, about the pony standing in the field beyond her bedroom window, the trees swaying in the night. She writes these things as clearly as she can and sometimes she leaves the diary blank.

On the fourth night she walks down to the chapel, an outhouse with a bare concrete floor, three pews, a small altar at one end. A woman is arranging white roses on a side table. She touches her chest. "Clare," she says.

She has a young face though her hair is streaked with grey. She is wearing vestments, a collar. Katherine nods hello and steps backwards until she is standing on the threshold.

"Do you want the space to yourself?"

"No," says Katherine. "It's okay."

"You wanted to talk?"

"My father died."

"I'm sorry."

She waits a moment. As soon as she says it – "My father died" – there is pain. She pauses, halts the feeling, clenches her teeth and then, without thinking much, she is sitting on the pew, crying, and Clare is sitting beside her.

“Shall we pray?”

Katherine mimics the woman’s gesture, lacing her hands together. She remembers being on her knees in the graveyard back home, asking herself if she believed in something. She asked the day, asked the white sky beyond the spire and then, closer, she said to her own hands, to a self estranged by the sound of her own voice, “Do you believe in God, Katherine?”

The woman sits back on the pew. She pinches an earlobe, as though demonstrating herself. The candles put ovals of light against the wall.

“He had a heart attack,” says K. “Someone went to see him. He told my father what I’d done.”

The words die in her throat, stuttering, caught, like a choked heart. She looks at her arms, the white flurry of scars across them, a history, her, damage. Her father died thinking badly of her. Clare puts a hand on her back. She closes her eyes.

As she steps outside she bumps into Alex and puts her hand on his shoulder. “I’m sorry,” she says. He is her father’s age.

He looks at her blankly then cocks his head, a glimmer of recognition. He puts out his hand but drops it before she can shake with him. He takes a butt from the breast pocket of his plaid shirt. The wind moves around them, skittering dead leaves. A shutter claps loudly, once.

“Lost something,” he says.

As though vaguely remembering what the gesture connotes, he taps his thighs. She takes out her lighter and he leans into the flame. Graham says he has Korsakoff’s, brain damage. All he has is the present moment. The past shifts, assembling and reassembling itself

in such a way that he can keep his balance. He turns his back on her, walks between the box-shrubs to the meditation garden and sits on a stone crescent bench. She sits beside him. They smoke and look at the moon. She remembers her father, a feeling, a shape inside her. She imagines what it is like for Alex, to sense the contours of his own past, like a faith, but to not understand what it is he doesn't know. They sit here for a while and then she stands, nods solemnly to him, to the garden, and she likes very much the way he raises a hand and looks back at the moon, forgetting her. It makes it easier to look at her own footsteps, to understand that she is herself but that this need not mean very much. Maybe she will go back to the chapel. Maybe she will lay her head in Clare's lap, or Christine's, or her mother's. Maybe she will find her father sitting on a pew, eyes closed, head lowered. She stops by the kitchen doors. There's a bowl of milk by the drain, gone violet in the moonlight. A cat or the foxes will come for it.

...

The shadow of a deity passes over the water.

...

She puts the radio on and sleeps for a while and then Christine is calling her name from the bottom of the stairs. She wakes up confused, the tatty remnants of a dream in her hair, like flowers. They sit in her office. There are slogans up on the wall. *You are a miracle.*

"I've been reading your diaries," says Christine. "It's a pleasure to read them in the morning, but you don't say a lot about how you feel."

Katherine waits for a question.

"You know what this is about, Katherine? Recovery. Treatment. Getting well."

Katherine nods. There is a windchime at the windows, sunlight, a break in the winds, a period of calm. She feels a gentle shiver at the back of her neck and, like that, she is very moved.

They don't speak for a while and then Christine says, "You can take your time. You still have twelve weeks here, more if we can get the funding. But you need to start thinking about how things have been for you, how you feel about yourself."

Miraculous, thinks K. A word that births itself.

She says, "I like it here. I'm not drinking."

"So you can remember this place. If those old feelings come on you, you can know that this place was here and you were sober... But you didn't really answer me. What do you think of yourself? What sort of person do you see yourself as, deep down?"

She isn't sure where to start, or why. It would be a story without a backbone, a narrative without a centre. She lets it go for a moment. She looks at Christine, patient, frowning. Christine is always neatly dressed, she smells good. K. thinks of constants like that, something about herself which is always the same. She listens to the windchimes. A feeling of profound, swelling joy glides through her. It feels like an answer so she says, "I have the capacity for such joy, Christine."

Christine leans forward and puts a hand over Katherine's.

She tries to look at her past, the way her feelings intersect with her actions, this intractable flux. She tries to isolate a turning point, something pivotal, something she can confidently present to both herself and Christine as evidence of a clear and sensible narrative. It seems unnecessary. She looks at her hands. She is here, and that's true.

“I like films,” she says. “I like to write.”

“Yes. Why tell me that?”

She thinks of the scenes she has been writing, a woman much like herself. She travels. Eastern Europe, Russia. A hotel room in Prague, a woman, Ivana, gesturing towards the walls. *They have a splatter expert, says Ivana. Did you know that? What happened when, according to where the blood is, how it fell, how it was projected.*

“You’re a good person,” says Chris.

Katherine laughs.

“You don’t think that’s true?”

...

John drives her into town and she buys some things from the bright indoor shopping centre. She buys a hairbrush, some peach shower gel, lipstick, Vaseline, moisturiser. She buys underwear and a notebook without lines, some DVDs from the charity shop, a red and white shirt, a pair of warm gloves, some chocolate peanuts from a stall. It is nice to buy things. They have coffee together. They wander down to the Pantiles and she buys some second-hand books, books that she’s owned before, books that she read and lost, gave away or left behind.

On their way back John asks if she has begun to pray. She turns on the radio. It’s an advert for windows and then it’s a cello, very calm, then it builds and the road is overhung with blossom trees. The music is enough, is an answer.

“You have friends, Katherine?”

“Yes,” she says. “I had a friend.”

She raises a finger. "One for sure."

John laughs. "That's all?"

"More, maybe. People I know." She shrugs.

"What does it mean to you? Friendship?"

Pause.

"You mean a shared past," she says. "Being able to predict how a person might react in a given situation. To know someone."

"That's all there is to it?"

No, we might say, that doesn't sound like her. Or, Yes, that sounds like Katherine.

"What about support," says John. "Love. That's what friends are for, isn't it?"

She touches her chest, as if offended. "Do you not see, John, that I love you? That I love everyone?"

"Are you being funny because you don't understand the question?"

She thinks about it. She's hungry and tired. The chaotic memory of the mall, its hyperactive lights, sedate pedestrians. It makes her mind busy and so she concentrates on the road, on the music, on their passage along the smooth asphalt, the leaning trees, weak sunlight flicking through the gaps. She looks forward to being home, sitting by the window in her neat little room, the bedsheets taut and cold.

"I don't really understand it," she says. "The particularity of it."

He waits.

“It doesn’t matter,” she says.

She is no longer sure what they’re talking about. She remembers him asking about prayer so she says, “I don’t pray to God,” and she means to go on, to tell him that’s it all prayer, that it is easy to pray, but he interrupts her.

“I do,” he says. “I pray for a sober day each morning, and each night I thank God for a sober day.”

She has an itch at the corner of her eye. She lets it intensify then she rubs her eyes and says, “What a relief!”

“What?”

The unfamiliar roads are suddenly familiar and then, like that, they are home.

6.

She washes out her mouth and spits bloody. In the middle cubicle she drops the seat and knocks up a couple of lines. She flushes the loo, does the coke and sighs, clarifying her body with a shiver. Her eyes water and she palms them clear. Written small in the grouting in pencil, *Who am I?* Underneath it, *Who cares?*

She steps with the music and tries to find it but a thought of the boy keeps pushing her out of the rhythm, his scalp slipping back, the sound of the roller whipping across his head.

She moves with a boy, her hands along the hem of his vest and he takes her fingers and they're sticky and she looks at her bloody hands while he backs up, the music changes, the dance floor empties and new people move in around her. She does some shots at the bar then orders a brandy and a blonde Irish girl in a blue dress tips her Southern Comfort into Katherine's lap. Katherine dumps her glass beside the girl's. The tumbler scatters, the girl backs up, hands at her thighs, palms out. "The fuck!" she says.

The girl's friends pull her away. K. goes out back, into the kitchen to talk to Zee but Zee isn't there, the lights are off. She sits on the grey chest freezer. It's not quiet at all, she can still hear the music and he's left the extractor fans on. She turns them off at the wall and stands in the dimness with her arms by her sides.

...

The place is emptying out as she finishes the coke and comes back down from the loos. The music goes off. Lights up, last orders.

The relative quiet leaves a gap in the room and she walks into it as she approaches the bar. She feels tearful and sad. She sees Billy-boy, old road-sweep Bill, sitting at a lone high stool, his trilby cocked, a warm pint of Fosters between his hands.

“You having a brandy, Bill?”

His head sways. “No, Kaffrin, I don’t want a fucking brandy.”

“What’s up?” she says.

“I’m sick of being drunk.”

“Well I’m not.”

“No, well you’re young, ent ya.”

“Yes.”

Natasha gives her a brandy, tells her to make it her last. “Tanya’ll be down in a minute,” she says.

She takes her drink outside, some aluminium tables under the window. The people around her are shaking hands and kissing one another, waiting for cabs, walking down the wide Broadway. Katherine’s still a little high, her thoughts are racing but they don’t seem to be about anything. She smokes a cigarette and finishes her brandy and wants another and she stares across the road, The Black Bull fully lit, staff putting the chairs up inside. The sky is black.

“Katherine.”

She looks up. Edward.

“Join me,” she says.

He checks the fat white watch on his wrist. Sweat lightly gleams his skin. “They still serving?”

“Natasha’ll give you a drink.”

She smiles, her voice is thick. She holds a loose fist under her chin, opens her hand and says, “Ar bit mar tongue.”

She sits thoughtless until he comes back out and says, “Too late, wouldn’t serve me.”

She puts back her chair and moves past him.

Gemma’s polishing the T-bars. She looks up and says, “We’re done, Katherine.” And then, quietly, “Don’t start.”

“I’ll get it myself,” she says.

She leans across the bar for a glass but her ribs are shrill and she winces back. Natasha rolls her eyes. Tanya comes out from the kitchen with a bottle of Courvoisier in each fist. K. touches her lapels, holds her blazer closed and stands here with her mouth slightly open. Tanya says, “Time to go home, Katherine.”

“Okay.”

She nods her head. She remembers sitting in the office with Tanya, early, drunk, Mav mopping the hallway as Tanya turned herself in the office chair, her feet against the safe. “This is a problem, Katherine...”

She turns to leave and says quietly, “Goodnight.”

“Are you okay?” says Tanya.

(“Were you skanking the tills as well? Or just stealing stock?”)

“Both, really.”)

“I’m fine,” says K.

“Sure?”

“Drunk.”

“Yeah.”

Edward’s holding the door. She walks past him. She wants to be back at the room, safe, alone. He follows her, puts his arm through hers and she shakes him off and faces him and his eyes are bright and he’s young, a little younger than she is.

“I’m going home,” she says.

“The house?”

“No,” she says. “Down the way.” She nods vaguely.

“Some company?”

...

They buy brandy and beers and cigarettes and crisps and a big Polish sausage from the Continental Supermarket. There’s a police car pulled up near Macready’s, its blue light turning. The street’s quiet. The police officer watches them pass.

There’s no one on the front desk. She takes her key from the box and the room is as she left it. She flicks the desk lamp on, the wall scorched around the plug socket, blood scattered across the carpet. Edward stands with his hand on the sink. She drops her satchel on the chair and turns to face him.

“What happened?”

She slips off her blazer, uses the side of her foot to push pieces of the dinner plate under the chair.

“Your arms,” he says. “You’re covered in blood.”

“It’s alright,” she says. He moves towards her. She bites her teeth. His hands cup her elbows. She looks at his eyes. “It’s okay,” she says.

He touches her bloody arm. She takes his hand in hers.

“It hurts?”

“No.”

She kisses him. Her mouth is full of her own tongue. Her lips are numb. Kissing him is funny and she smiles and holds his chin and he smiles as well. He has good teeth and green eyes, cat-like.

“Let me have a wash.”

She empties her cigarette packet onto the windowsill and starts collecting up the pills from the bedspread. She brushes the rest to the floor, taps the mattress. “Sit,” she says. He does.

She takes off her shirt and splashes water over her arms, smearing the blood wet and then rinsing it off. He takes out a beer and opens it but doesn’t drink, he just holds it in his lap. She pushes her thumb at the tip of her nose, snorts back a throat-full of bitter coke bogeys, spits in the sink and washes it away. He squashes the end of his shoe at the blood-damp carpet. The worried look on his face, childlike and sweet, breaks into a grin. “So how’ve you been?” he says.

She wraps a sock around the top of her arm, the toes between her teeth. She ties it off, smiles, shrugs. She picks up the boy’s paring knife.

“What’s that?”

“A knife.”

He nods. She puts it in her satchel, steps onto the bed and sits against the wall. He puts his beer down and they kiss and slowly move lengthwise, holding each other. She's drunk, spinning, her head fast. He strokes the fishhook tattoo on the top of her left wrist, places a warm thumb on the stamp-sized black heart over her liver. His body feels tight and good.

...

She's sitting up in bed with the brandy between her knees. She cuts a thick piece of the sausage meat with her bank card, sandwiches it between two crisps and passes it to him.

"It's good?"

He nods. "Smashing."

She swigs from the brandy. The night has leaked out of the sky and a thin white and blue morning strains through, clean and weak.

"What are you doing today?"

"It's Sunday," he says.

"Yes."

"Church."

"You're going?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you come? See mum, Irene..."

She shakes her head.

“Got better plans?”

She opens her mouth. She is speechless and it makes them both smile.

“Clean yourself up on a Sunday morning,” he says. “Check in, face the right way.
Makes you feel good.”

She nods.

“You like me?” he says.

“Yes.”

“You like me more than other people?”

“What other people?”

“I don’t know,” he says. Pause. “How would you feel if you never saw me again?”

“You’re going away?”

“No.” He takes the bottle from between her knees and puts it on the floor. “I don’t
think you’d feel anything about it at all,” he says.

...

Her mother is standing in the garden. Cornflowers, blue and purple, her mother’s head
dipped as though she’s looking out from under the brim of a hat, her cheeks flushed, her
voice slack and dopey. The sunlight is strong and yellow. The heads of the poppies are
razored. They ooze blackly. Her mother tucks a flower behind Katherine’s ear.

“A flower given to my daughter.”

...

She scrambles to the edge of the bed. Her knees wobble as she steps off the mattress and she trips to the sink, clamping its cold shoulders. Her stomach convulses. She retches for a while, spitting up bile, bitter and bloody. She breathes until it's gone.

Edward is sitting on the edge of the bed holding his jeans. She stands swaying on the spot. It's morning proper.

"Get me a beer, please."

She sits on the bed.

"Edward."

He passes her a beer. She uses both hands and drinks most of it and it courses through her, her stuttering body limbering almost immediately. She keeps it down and smokes a cigarette and opens another can and lies down. She doesn't want him to be there anymore. The pale light of the day outside is like a flower and she is thinking of flowers. She wants to get back to her sleep and that's what the dream was about, about the weak light, about flowers with papery leaves and clean perfume the colour of sunlight. She gathers a little puddle of herself towards the comfortable place made by the first drink and she ignores everything else, whatever it was, and very sweetly she surrenders back into sleep with a smile on her face.

He's gone when she wakes again.

7.

Characters do emote. Katherine emotes. She is crying in the alley beside the pension. It escalates, she's weeping, bent double, she's exhausted, her organism – she – has been through a lot. She weeps until it wears itself out and then she stands here, arms limp, lit by a streetlight, or the moon. She hums to herself.

...

She and Graham are hanging paper decorations from the rafters. There is a small plastic tree in the corner, some presents they have bought one another wrapped in brown paper. They are listening to the radio. John comes in and admires the tree, the presents, the decorations.

“New arrival,” he says. The man stoops needlessly under the beams and puts out his hand. “Tommy,” he says.

They shake, they say welcome. He has a wonky left eye, the fingers of his left hand bent and scarred up. John reads the house rules written on the whiteboard and then Tommy signs his name underneath Katherine's. She shows Tommy to his room. He sits on the narrow bed, puts a hand up and touches the sloping ceiling. “This is alright, isn't it.”

“Yes,” she says. “It's nice here.”

“Gotta be better'n out there,” he says. “Barely made it out alive.”

He's smiling. He asks where she's from.

“Essex,” she says.

He's out of east London, Canning Town. “Came here from Anchor House,” he says.

“You know it?”

She does.

“Good people,” he says.

He unties the black bags and starts taking out his things then he pauses and, on his knees, he smooths a hand over the stiff brown bedspread.

“Done a lot of jail,” he says.

She smiles.

“I weren’t showing off, just...”

She turns to leave.

“You feeling it?” he asks.

“Feeling what?”

“I don’t know. Better.”

“Yes,” she says. “I couldn’t walk very well. I had peripheral neuritis. It came and went. I was sick a lot.”

“But it’s gone?”

She taps her thighs, smiles.

“You miss it?” he says.

“The drink?”

“Yeah.”

She shrugs.

“What’s the hardest thing about it?”

“Being present,” she says. “All the time.”

They are quiet for a while.

“Well I’m glad you’re here, girl. Think we can get through it?”

“Yes,” she says. “I don’t see why not.”

...

It is dark, a week after Christmas. They walk arm in arm. At the top of the hill the treeline finishes and fields take over, low barbed wire fences closing them off. Tommy stops by the fence and looks out over the strawberry fields, the tunnels sagging with water. His first walk beyond the grounds. There’s an old concrete shack in the field, its windows broken.

“I used to come here,” he says. “Kid you not. Back when me brother and me were little. We used to come here, this exact place. We stayed in that hut.”

He walks to the fence and she flashes the light at his back, picking him out of the darkness, the rain ticking against her shoulders. He turns and pulls down the hood of his coat.

“Had no idea where I was coming you know. Kent, all I knew. God, that’s thirty years ago we were here. Boys.” He shakes his head, baffled, pleased, as though it proves something. He links his arm through hers.

They buy sweets and fizzy drinks and sit on the war memorial in the centre of the village. They eat some Bakewell tarts.

“Bench drinker,” he says.

“Me too,” she says.

He sips on his Vimto. “Don’t really cut it, does it.”

She smiles. She looks at the tall house opposite, a facade of turtle-coloured brick, glossy ivy kept neat around the doorway. An upstairs window is lit. A woman walks to the window, pauses and looks at her open hands, as though trying to remember what she is supposed to do with them. Katherine looks at her own hands and when she looks up the woman has gone and a painting on the back wall takes her place in the frame. Katherine is still here. She smiles at Tom and he recognises her. The roads smell wet. It’s winter. She has to be somewhere and she is here, sitting on a war memorial. She stands. She puts out her hands and Tom takes them in his.

...

They stay up late playing pool. He tells her about his mother dying, how he’d not long been out when she died.

“Got all depressed,” he says. “Figured I was better off back in jail. Marched down to the station one morning in a pair of shorts and me flip flops, tossed me knife over the pass and said, Nick me. He’s picked up the knife, slapped it on the counter, gone, We can’t nick ya, Tom. There’s a knife amnesty on.”

She laughs.

“Cunts,” he says. “Me favourite knife ‘n all.”

He makes coffee and they go out to the shed. A varying drum-roll of rain on the corrugated roof. He tells her about his lonely childhood, skipping school to wander around on the docks, stealing motorbikes, getting into fights. He tells her about his hand-me-down clothes, his mother who died with a swollen belly and a stash of empty bottles under the bed.

He tells her about the priest, about being abused as a kid, about going back to that church shortly before he came in and asking another priest for help.

“It was him got me into Anchor House,” he says. “Probably saved me life. I went from there to the detox, sobered up and realised I’d left two loaded guns under the mattress. Christ,” he says. “What a mess.” He pauses.

“You have family, Tom?”

“Older brother. Me kid brother was killed. Stabbed to death. Me and me big brother took him round there. Were gonna knock over this dealer, but he knew we were coming. They came at us with knives, hatchets. We scattered, didn’t realise we’d left him bleeding to death in the stairwell. I found him. Years later. Fella that stabbed him. I was going to kill him.”

“You didn’t.”

They drink their tea.

“You do make a good cuppa, Tom.”

“That’s cos I was molested as a child.”

They laugh. How easily this is done. How easy it is to love someone.

8.

She sits in the corner and nods good morning to the guy sitting in the middle of the opposite row. He nods back, a scar on his eyebrow, a triangle of yellow toast between his fingers. He turns the pages of a newspaper.

The ceiling is high and there's a single narrow window at the end of the room. A small round table with a high stem sits in front of it, a jug of orange squash, a tube of plastic cups, the room full of dusty sunlight. She pushes her hands between her thighs. Her arms tremble lightly. She should make a call, to Joe, to her father. The man opposite strokes his stubble and takes a bite of floppy toast. Katherine looks behind herself at the murky oil paintings against the wall.

There's an open archway on her right and a step down into the kitchen. A big Caribbean woman stands at the stove. Oil spits. Breakfast smells curl into the room. The woman hums to herself, a soft lilting noise.

Katherine shifts back her chair and walks self-consciously across the room. There is an alarmed weakness behind her elbows and knees. She takes a cup from the tube and uses both hands on the heavy jug. The cup falls over as the juice hits it and she sets the jug down and wobbles back to the table, bracing herself with a palm back into her seat. Juice dribbles to the carpet. The woman hums. Katherine looks at the man who looks from the window to Katherine and smiles.

The woman steps out of the kitchen wiping her hands slowly on the hem of her spearmint coloured vest. She nods at the man and says, "Okay?" and he says, "Aye, cheers," and gestures with his toast.

Her voice is quiet and precise, like a biro on clean paper. "Would you like breakfast?"

“Yes, please.”

“It’s beans and eggs and toast.”

“Thank you,” says Katherine.

The woman brings out a silver pudding dish with butter in, another of strawberry jam. She gives Katherine a plastic knife and fork. Her body craves sugar with a thin, savage lust. The man coughs and folds his paper and walks through the open archway out to the lobby. She watches him stand at the front doors, light a cigarette, pocket his hands and rock back on his heels, smoking.

The woman brings Katherine a plate of food. The atmosphere of the room feels very fragile. She wants to pair it with her gestures, to solemnise them somehow but her hands shake too badly, she can’t butter her toast. She eats half a piece dry but it’s difficult to chew. The morsels of toast simmer at her hips and put an uncomfortable warmth there. She shifts the waist of her jeans over her navel and sits here for a while and then she sucks a fried egg from her plate and eats some jam with her fingers. The sweetness flares along her jaw and her body swoons, it is so good.

She thinks about Edward. The evening is a chaotic noise in her mind and she tries to still her thoughts and bring something of their closeness back to herself, something comforting. The texture of her dream feels suddenly so present that she unconsciously touches her fingertips together, stroking it. The garden hectic with colour, her mother tucking a cornflower behind her ear.

“My blue-veined child.”

...

Dennis' friend paces in front of the bus shelter smoking a joint, a litter of shattered safety glass around his feet. Katherine's heartbeat quickens. She pauses. The sound of a piano playing drifts from the propped sash window of a tall terrace. A girl in a burgundy headscarf sits on the shelter's sloping seat chewing on a McDonalds straw, a Staffordshire terrier sitting quietly between her knees.

She sees Kay come out of the chicken shop across the road, two cans of Pepsi in one hand. He's about to get into the BMW idling by the kerb when he sees Katherine and nods. She gives a wave. A bus slides past. The traffic lights change, green to amber to red. The red lights are plush, swollen, the white clouds in the sky cartoon-like and fluffy. Kay left-rights the road and crosses. He holds up a fist and she bumps it. "Katherine."

"Hello, Kay. How are things?"

He nods. "Not bad," he says. "Off to mosque." He looks at his trainers. "Have a pray an that. How's you?"

"Good," she says.

"Cool, cool," he says, and then, "Gimme a call about that money, yeah? Do though, yeah?"

"Okay."

They touch fists. She could point out the boy. *There*, she could say. A confrontation.

Kay walks slowly over the road hitching his low-slung jeans. He drops a can of Pepsi and it bursts and fizzes and rolls to the kerb. K. walks briskly and the boy looks up at her, away, double-takes and steps up, glittering cubes of glass under his feet.

"Here she is," he says. "Cunt."

She winces. He flicks his joint at the wall. The phone in his hand lights up and starts singing and the Asian girl says very quietly, “Oh mar gosh, that her?”

“You put my boy in the hospital.”

She can’t think of anything to say so she says sorry and she realises it’s true.

He kisses his teeth and slowly shakes his head. A sash window slams closed, pinching off the music and, in order to restart it, she reaches out, she touches his chest. He slaps her hand away and steps back.

“Fuck off me,” he says.

Another bus pulls in. The girl slides off the seat. The dog stands and looks up at her.

...

K. leans in the doorway. Helen sits at the kitchen table with some work spread out. A comedy panel show plays from a wind-up radio at her elbow. She clips the lid on a yellow highlighter pen, sets it on the table and squashes her lips together, a flatline smile.

“Hello, Katherine.”

“Hello. I came to see if I left anything.”

“You left loads of stuff, Katherine. I bagged it up and left it in your room. I tidied your room.”

“Thank you.”

Helen shifts the sleeves of her hoodie to her elbows. “You drank my wine,” she says, and Katherine nods her head a few times, pressing a splinter back into its groove in the doorframe.

“I did. I’m sorry.”

“Where are you staying?”

“A B&B for now.”

“You didn’t have to leave. I know you didn’t pay rent but we still have a couple of weeks on the tenancy. There’s no one else here. I don’t mind.”

“Thank you.”

“The offer’s there.”

“Thank you.”

Helen turns off the radio.

“I haven’t got anything to drink.”

“That’s okay,” says Katherine. “Some coffee?”

She makes K. some coffee and they stand in the garden. Katherine squats against the wall and smokes a cigarette. Helen toes a stained outburst of blue poster-paint on the patio, smiling, remembering, perhaps, water-balloon fights, barbecues. Katherine would like to find something to say. She watches the dangling tubes of next door’s windchime sway gently without colliding. There is apple blossom on the trees. It smells good.

“Are you not going back?”

Katherine shrugs.

“To school, I mean.”

“I don’t know.”

“It seems a shame,” says Helen.

She’s about to go inside, say thanks and leave, when Helen says, “Is it because of the drinking?”

She tosses the dregs of her coffee at the bare flowerbed.

“Is what because of the drinking?”

Helen turns her palms out as if to say, *This*.

...

She opens a beer and sets it on the windowsill. The room’s tiny. The single bed has been stripped and four tied-off bin bags line the wall. The wardrobe doors are open and inside it Helen’s bound her books and paperwork into waist-high stacks. Katherine slides out a thick bundle of work and sits on the bed and drinks a beer. She reads through some of her papers. She surprises herself. Her grades are excellent. She puts everything back, unties one of the bin bags and finds some clean clothes. She shouts through thanks to Helen as she leaves.

9.

(Her story has no impact on her value as a human being).

...

John leads her to the group room, the chairs set up in a broken circle with hers facing the rest. The men come in. She's standing. They sit. John fetches a carafe of water from the side, pours her a glass, says, "Take a seat, Katherine." She does.

Christine lights the oil burner at the centre of their circle. K. looks through her papers. An account of what happened, shaped by prompts. *How did your drinking make you of little use to other people? When did you have good reason not to drink, and drank anyway?*

Christine introduces the occasion. "Today we welcome Katherine. She will give us the privilege of reading her Step One."

She clears her throat. A performance. She starts where she starts and because it's where she starts, this is the beginning.

She tells them about walking the dog when she was little, about taking a cam-corder and filming the bulrushes quivering on the marshes, about taking off her clothes and squashing herself into the smooth clay hollows as clouds smouldered on the horizon.

"There was the world," she says, "so absorbed with itself, and there was me. I felt as though everyone was pretending and I couldn't understand why they wouldn't own up to it. And then I felt bad for not being in on the act. And everything I did to try and play the game just showed how little I understood it. At some point," she says, "I gave up."

She pauses for a long time. It is so satisfying to story things like this. This is what they want to hear and as she describes these feelings she brings them to life, she experiences them now, which means that she is telling the truth, and she is powerfully moved by it.

In time, she tells them about Bob, about blue lights turning in the rear-view mirror, and though she means to explain what happened and when, that Kyle and Joe fought over her, that they loved her, that she and Joe went to Kyle's father and they did what they did, she presents them out of sequence, with moments suggesting or echoing those which they succeed or anticipate, and as she reads she realises how fractured her chronology is, yet there is an impetus to it, an associative continuity that seems to satisfy their thirst for catharsis, they are ripe for it, she is ripe for it, she can feel their engagement pulsing like blood through her quickening heart. She presses a thumb to her wrist and feels her pulse – *thmp* – there.

She tells them about getting a train down to the south coast, the life of Christ enacted in a barn in a wide field, burying the money in a copse of birch trees and then, months or weeks later, digging it up again and leaving a note (for whom?), about her father strapped to a narrow fold-out wheelchair, her face crumpling as he was loaded onto the ambulance ramp. A scene which didn't happen, she was gone when he died, east London, B&Bs, a scene which suggests there is guilt here, that if she hadn't hurt Bob then Kyle would have had no need to confront her father. Things happen, and then other things happen, and as she begins to story things this way, with a quiet fervour, she begins to formulate an opinion of herself, to measure each moment against a better alternative, to give weight to the cumulative disparity between what she could have been and what she is. There is a glimmer of belief, she believes for a moment that if she can attach herself to this story, if she can pair these emotions with a sensible history then this correlative trajectory will define her. She begins to engage with the lie of a self and the kinship she feels towards her peers is elevated by what is shared. She leans into the feeling and is surprised to find tears in her eyes, and by leaning into this

narrative she is able to believe that by doing things differently she will redress the bad events of her past, she will be a better person going forth. She believes for as long as she is reading, and then she stops reading and looks up and most of them have tears in their eyes and are moved and the clouds have shifted and wet sunlight comes through the glass and lies across her shoulder, dividing her two hands. A blackbird trills.

Christine nods, lips pursed, crying, and she says, “Thank you for sharing that with us, Katherine.”

K. identifies with her past long enough to enjoy the feeling of sloughing it off.

10.

A minivan pulls onto the drive and a man gets out shielding his eyes. He shakes everyone's hands. She gives Tommy a hug. "Be good," he says. "I'm right behind ya."

They drive along country roads. Sometimes they are up high and there are steep wooded hillsides either side of them, a great wood, a forest. Len speaks with his mouth almost closed, an Irishman, her father's age, rotund and droll. She feels very cheerful and it's nice to move around, to be living somewhere else.

"What's it called," she says. "Where we're going."

"The Malthouse," says Len.

"The town."

"Uckfield."

She repeats it, nodding her head.

"You know it?"

"Yes," she says.

...

A church butts up against the cottage, the spire poking above the low roof, as though it grows out of the rehab. It tolls the quarter hour.

"You get used to it," says Len.

He shows her around. Her room is small and neat and it looks out over the graveyard. The stones are old. They lean.

...

She follows the riverbank, crosses a sty, smells the warm minerals and algae of the river. She keeps walking until the river bends away from her and the path broadens into a field of bluebells, elderflower and hawthorn along one edge, a birch wood beyond it. The smells are soft and weightless. It was unlikely that she would come back here but she told them about it, about burying the money, and so it makes sense to her that has, by chance, ended up back in this place. She walks through the birch wood, through the zigzag of mosquitoes, catching, briefly, the clean, healthy smell of woodsmoke, a thin ribbon of it wavering between the trees. She comes to a fractured line of train tracks in a bed of thin gravel. She follows the tracks until they peter out and she feels certain that she will come upon the place she came to twice before. She asks herself, in a way, why she is certain of that. She looks at the sky, the strengthening grey clouds, and she feels as though the question has been addressed somehow. She remembers these high bridges running diagonally across the wide path and though she doesn't remember the way precisely she feels very strongly that this sequence, now, is overlapping another. She turns off the path very abruptly, without thinking, heads up a very steep incline and comes suddenly clear, a hilltop, an open field. She is sure that she will film this, that she will film a woman emerging from the head of the pass, a little out of breath, a harsh wind on the soundtrack, which fades, which leads to a cut, a long, wide shot of the fields, an elevated view, the bluish smudge of a town a long way in the distance. A large white barn over to the left, a tall white crucifix some distance from it.

She digs with her hands. The first spot is frustrated by a tangle of roots so she scoots over on her knees, tries again, finds nothing and on the third shallow dig she uncovers the bag, pulls it loose, shakes the mud free and opens it. She reads the note she has written to herself or to someone else, then she lays back and looks through the foliage, the clean darkening sky beyond.

11.

She sits up by the halfway doors, the bus packed, sunlight bouncing through the dusty windscreen. She smells herself. She washed the blazer and wrung it out but it's damp, she smells of blood. She takes the cigarette packet from her blazer pocket, palms a few more pills and washes them back with cold beer, passively dropping the scenery as it passes. Scruffy shopfronts, the brickwork grimy with exhaust fumes, a pub with a flat roof, windows grilled, St George's bunting flapping lazily. Plaistow. People move through the day. They are themselves.

The bus exhales, the doors flop open and a tall black man in a vest gets on with a baby over his shoulder. The schoolboy in front of Katherine stands and lets the man sit down. The baby opens its tiny bright eyes, its greyish lips glistening. The dad's big hand gently taps the baby's back and it blinks in time. The light is angelic.

There's a holdup by Barking Road. The bus sits still for a long time. The crowd's numb patience doesn't change and so Katherine too stays impassive, quietly cheerful. She bends her little finger in front of the baby's eyes. When the bus moves again there's an ambulance for a moment up close to the opposite windows. K. sees the shoulders and heads of two paramedics kneeling on the road, administering. Their epaulettes glimmer. A black hatchback with its bonnet crumpled, its engine steaming lightly in the glossy heat. Her stomach cramps. She winces. It doesn't seem to make much sense that her body reacts as she swallows these pills. She swallows a few more.

...

End of the line. A long curving driveway in front of A+E, a playing field across the road, trees along two of its edges. Some boys play football across it, their shouts faint. She

walks a way round the building and sits on the grass beneath a long window with its blinds down. The plush grass is full of daisies and then there's a narrow road for hospital vehicles and then a powder-blue clapboard fence before the raised track of the Docklands Light Railway. She opens a beer, screws the base of it into the grass. She has six left. She sets out the pills, her tobacco. She straightens her legs and digs around in her pocket and withdraws the flimsy razorblade. She pushes her right sleeve up to the elbow and swipes the razor along the inside of her forearm. A quick six inches opens narrowly. It fills bright red. Before the sting intensifies she swipes over it, harder, following the first line. The cut widens. The edges are marbled white. The blood darkens. A deep, bleeding ache begins to soak through the pain. She shifts her blazer down, drinks, swallows a few more pills. The sky changes hue. The sun is going down. A train curves past.

Over to her left, above the playing fields, a marbled spread of cloud moves towards the hospital. She watches the boys jogging in the field, the black-cherry smear of shifting clouds, the trees swaying silently.

She finishes her beer and walks to the back of the hospital. A long glassed corridor extends out from the main building. A nurse comes out of the fire exit at its end and Katherine walks in before the doors close, holding her arm by her belly and then out by her side, letting blood patter along the corridor as she follows it to a wide atrium with doors leading off into various departments. The sign above one of the doors reads, *Bereavement Suite*.

She follows the corridor to a refectory. There's a shutter down over the counter and the chairs are upturned on the tables. The strip-lighting is blank and there's no one around. The swing-door into the kitchen is held open by a rubber stopper but the fridges and chest freezers are padlocked closed. On top of a microwave there's a beige Styrofoam box with two

warm sausage rolls inside. Katherine takes it and follows the corridor the way she came but is lost for a while and then she comes out in the car park. She walks across the road to the playing fields and sits on the grass.

The game seems to be winding down. She eats some of a sausage roll and throws a few pieces of pastry high into the air. A pigeon and then a few more appear.

The boys walk loose-limbed to the far goal, gathering their bags, stripping off their jerseys. She's running out of pills. The atmosphere breaks. A flutter of lightning above the horizon and then a satisfying roll of thunder. Rain comes. Some of the boys delight in it, holding out their arms, their heads tilted back. That lush smell of minerals and thunder. Katherine clenches her teeth. Her stomach cramps. She is in pain and the world seems very beautiful. The feeling makes nothing new, it just passes, leaving a faint bruise. The world carries on.

She finishes her beer. Her stomach revolts at the last mouthful and she vomits a little and swallows it. She tries to tongue out the bitter, chalky taste of the pills.

She looks at her sodden sleeve. She's covered in blood again. The rain intensifies. She has no one to apologise to and yet she says, "Sorry," aloud.

She pushes up her sleeve. She puts the blade at the top of the cut, presses heavily and then whips it down. Something bursts. She looks away, opens another beer, does the last of the pills and forces down the can as the rain comes down in heavy obscuring rods.

12.

Sometimes he asks her about her childhood, her parents, about her drinking, but for the most part he just lets her talk and she tells him some of the things she can remember. She tells him about her ideas, a book she is writing that is much like her life. He misunderstands her.

“You are trying to make sense of what happened,” he says.

“No,” she says.

“What then?”

“It’s not the story that matters.”

“So what matters?”

She obscures truth by making sense of these things. There is nothing to explain. There is a long silence. The room is small, their chairs close, knees almost touching.

“Christine mentioned that you were on trial for something.”

“Yes,” says Katherine. She remembers the evening as clearly as she can. She looks at the ceiling.

“You were drunk?” says Len.

“Yes,” she says. “But I remember it.”

“How do you feel about all that?”

Pause.

“It would have been very frightening for him,” she says.

Clearly, he thinks there is a blockage here and she wonders if it is true, if she can make it true, if she could find something to expose that might yield a piercing sense of relief or insight.

“The man’s son, Kyle, went to see my father. My mother said Kyle told him what we’d done.”

Len nods, waiting.

“Maybe that’s why we did it,” she says. “Because of my father, because he died thinking badly of me, and so I took it out on someone else.”

“I’m confused,” says Len. “What happened first?”

He’s right, of course. Kyle can only have told her father what she and Joe did after they did it, which means that can’t be the reason. The motivation falls apart, it doesn’t work. “Then it must have been because of Joe,” she says. “They fought. Kyle stabbed him.”

“So you went to Kyle’s father. Because of Joe.”

She nods. “Okay.”

“Okay? Well is that why?”

Pause.

“Are you angry at Kyle? For telling your dad what you did?”

There are birds outside then there’s the sound of water trickling against the wall. Len raises himself and fingers a gap in the blinds.

“Tom’s watering his tomatoes.”

“He moves more easily,” she says.

Len nods his head, turns both palms up. “That’s how it works,” he says.

“Yes,” she says. “I don’t know what it is I’m expected to say sometimes. Two people are sitting in a room and what they say, the sounds they make, are somehow decisive.”

“It seems farfetched.”

“It does.”

“You think this is ridiculous?”

“It’s all ridiculous,” she says. “But that’s okay.”

...

The high grasses buzz with the heat. They stop by the lake. Tom stands on the edge and shouts loudly and they listen to him come back, hollow, doubling. She films the lake with her phone. Clouds shift. The shadow of a deity passes over the water. The lake is bordered by limestone cliffs that are easy to climb. They sit on a flat promontory for a while, the sun glaring down. Tom climbs the tree behind them and calls her over. “Here,” he says. “Have a look at that.”

He points at the branch between his legs and she squints up on tiptoes. *K* and *T* carved into the wood.

“You do that?” she says.

“Swear I never,” he says. “Fate.”

She smiles.

It’s true, it seems to her, if she wants it to, that there is something resembling the hand of fate in the fact that she is here, and when she rests in that space she feels held, safe, and the

whispering of the trees, the sporadic glinting of the light as the clouds shift, seem like the purposeful movements of something ineffable.

...

Jeffrey fails a breathalyser and she helps him pack then moves her stuff into his room. It's the size of a bedsit. There's a big bookshelf full of religious texts and books on psychology and psychiatry. She writes in the mornings and in the afternoons they have groups and then they all sit in the front room doing step work for a while, listening to the radio, chatting. She goes for long walks in the evening. She looks at the moon and thinks of herself walking across its surface. She has the feeling that she will remember this moment and she can only remember it when she is no longer here, when turning her hands and looking at them now and scraping the heavy mud from her boots is the past, and whatever feelings her body registers right now will be different. She looks at her muddy hands and tries to make sense of the feeling that time is undulating over her, moving her with it even as she stands here. Her fingers are cold, the mud is slick. She imagines this mud as it was without her, as it is, a lack of experience, a sudden vacuum of thought. A world without our experience of it is a banal reality. There is nothing to be said about it, because as soon as we say anything it becomes something it is not.

...

The trees in the garden, the hands on the clock-face, her dull reflection in the burnished steel of the kettle: everything is so clearly itself and nothing else that it takes her breath away. What is there to say when everything is already so clearly itself?

She tries to read but cannot move beyond the first page. By presenting a character, the writers confront her with the statement – I exist – then they go galloping off into story without seeming to realise that this statement alone is enough, leaving her breathless, unable

and unwilling to follow along with the complexities of a broader narrative that is so obviously unnecessary. With every step they take, the novels move further from the truth. There is silence, she decides, and there is too much noise, and there is nothing in between.

She prints out her work in the evenings and sits in the garden, the patio table bleached blue-white, bats zigzagging between the trees. She pares away at the sentences, carefully removing all that she can, and sometimes what's left is very pleasing and true and sometimes there is nothing left. In this way she pieces together a short little book, a story that is much like her life. Where there are gaps, moments which aren't motivated in a clear or sensible way, she invents some complicated psychological mechanisms, and all the characters act as though these motives are true and uncomplicated, and so they probably are. The events of her life, albeit allegorised, are more or less as they were, and she ties these sequences together with a central character who acts for clear and discernible reasons, whose psychology amounts to an internal mechanism driving the plot, and this mechanism is the peculiar lens through which we see a truth – what happens – which has nothing to do with it. She realises with some satisfaction that she has written a neat and comprehensible story.

It takes nine months and when she has finished she uses the computer room in the office to print it all out. She takes it back to her bedroom and ties a dark blue ribbon around it. She takes a photo with her phone then she sits in the desk chair and reads the last page, Katherine back where she started, a pub in east London, calling a cab.

13.

She is given a laminated card and directed round to Emergency Obs. There's an island workstation in the middle of the room, chairs around the outside. She sits. She holds her arm in her lap. She concentrates on the squeak and patter of passing footsteps, the gentle burring of phones. The sickness balances precariously behind her eyes. A woman in the corner with a blind stick between her legs. A little boy sitting on his mother's lap, his eyes dark-rimmed and sad. She stares forward. Her vision blurs.

A nurse leads her by the elbow and sits her in a corner and partitions them off with a paper curtain. She carefully removes Katherine's blazer and rests her arm on a chrome instruments trolley. She turns K's shirtsleeve back with a few neat folds and wipes the cut down with cold iodine. The gash is ugly and purple, bled-out, glistening. Katherine retches, dribbles and lets her head rock forward. The nurse fetches a cardboard bowl and nestles it into Katherine's lap.

A doctor kneels in front of her. He touches her arm and sighs and when she vomits it is acrid and frothy. The doctor touches the top of her arm, closes Dennis' cut with a couple of staples then snaps ten more along the inside of her forearm.

She's helped onto a bed, the head angled up. She pulls her knees close. The bed is pushed along a corridor, the motion smooth and enormous. She sways within it, heaving into the bowl at the crook of her arm.

...

A young Pakistani doctor in a white coat touches her sick bowl with the end of his pen. "What does that look like to you, Katherine?"

She looks at the blackish vomit. "Blood," she says.

“Yes, that’s what it looks like to me as well.”

She closes her eyes. She tries to retreat, to hide inside the rocking nausea, to still it somehow.

The doctor says, “I’m going to put my finger in your anus to see if your rectum is bleeding. Can you shift your jeans down for me?”

...

There is a cannula in the back of either hand. Cold vitamins soak into her. There are small merciful pockets inside which her sickness settles and then, like a tipping gyroscope, nausea rolls through her and she disappears inside it.

The curtain snickers across. A woman in the dimness holds a clipboard to her chest. She walks around the bed and kneels beside Katherine. A turquoise headscarf frames the neat oval of her face, her smooth, almond-coloured skin. A careful smile.

Katherine feels the woman’s hand touch her knee, rest there and slide away. The sickness retreats just enough that she comes back to herself, wracked and sweating. The woman speaks very softly. It’s like they are in a dormitory, whispering secrets to each other. She is a nurse with the hospital’s psychiatric team. Katherine wants to speak to her clearly but when she tries she dribbles thin yellow bile.

“Were you trying to kill yourself, Katherine?”

She can’t speak. The nurse explains that they will keep her here under section for a while.

“Rest, Katherine.”

Time folds into itself until it is smooth and fluid enough that it doesn't matter. The sickness is total. Even the barest motion of her fingertips agitates it and so she stays very still. She is unbearably thirsty.

The ward seems very long. She feels that there must be many scores of beds in here. Sometimes she feels that her mattress is on the floor and that people are stepping over her and the even beeping of the drip-stand segues mysteriously into a patient, animate code with which she feels a strong affinity, as though it is spelling something important and borderless, as though she is communing with it. She comes through the confusion with a clear awareness of the bag pressing against the soles of her feet and something important turns in her mind and then clarifies. There are beers in the bag.

She holds a pillow over the can and eases up the ring-pull. A muffled click-burst. She takes a long drink and it seams through her like love. She tries to swallow down the reflux and then leans over instinctively and the lager spills from her mouth, thick and fluffy. She steadies her breathing. Icy sweat gleams her forehead. She drinks.

It takes her a long time to finish the can. She pulls open the top drawer of the bedside table and puts the can inside it and then she lies down on her side with her hands outside the bed, suppliant and thin.

She sleeps peacefully for a while and when she wakes time has reassembled itself, the sickness has abated. Day.

...

Isolate the commentary, and put it aside.

...

She's parked at the end of the ward, a long window beside her, east London spread out after it. A television under the window shows the news, muted.

The nurse helps Katherine swing her legs round and sit on the side of the bed. Her big forearms are soft and warm and she says, "Ah, dare," and, "Come, come," as she helps put Katherine on the wheelchair commode and then changes her soiled jeans and wipes her legs down. She unclips the drip-feeds, peels the filthy shirt from her body and drapes a gown across her front. She holds a cup of tepid water to her lips and Katherine swallows down the pills that help with the shaking.

Another nurse brings a set of scales and the two of them help Katherine to stand but she's weak, her knees tremble and when they let her go the needle bounces around, settles very briefly, and then she falls back to the bed.

"That's okay. That will do."

They change the dressing on her arm and wince at the bruises on her ribs.

"X-ray?"

Katherine shakes her head. "No. It's okay."

In the afternoon she is offered tea. She declines and then changes her mind and she drinks half a cup of warm sweet tea and while the nurses are changing beds she drinks another can and puts the empty in her drawer.

...

She sleeps and wakes with a crippling black anxiety writhing inside her. It is unendurable. She cries, she can't help it, she whines, pleading, and the nurse comes and says, "Hush. Hush, Katherine," and fetches more pills.

...

The relief nurse hums to herself and says, “Good morning, Katherine,” and Katherine says, “Good morning,” while the other patients gently snore and then Eileen, with a start, says, “I don’t know anything about watches!”

At eight-thirty the Nigerian nurse clatters into the ward with the breakfast cart. Three of the six patients are nil by mouth, the other two are asleep. The lady stops by Katherine’s bed. She has straightened out the bed covers and is sitting cross-legged with her hands on her lap. One cannula is still in but the drips have finished for now. Katherine asks for some Weetabix and a slice of toast and some sweet tea. She carefully pulls the table round and eats.

You can keep it down, Katherine.

She sits with it for a few minutes. Tiredness has dried out her eyes. She pulls the waist of her trousers up over her navel. She smooths her hand across her hips. She goes to the toilet and purges awkwardly with her right hand.

...

The relief nurse removes the second cannula and Katherine walks to the end of the ward. Above the nurses’ station there is a whiteboard with a table drawn on it, patients’ names and details written into the boxes. Katherine likes the transience of this place. It feels nice. The head sister looks up from her paperwork. “Are you going somewhere?”

“A cigarette?”

The sister shakes her head.

“If I’m escorted?”

“Sorry.”

The nurse smiles and Katherine smiles back. She walks back to her bed. There's an old movie on the television and she watches it with the sound low. James Mason stumbles, shot, down a dark Dublin road.

...

She takes some clean pants from her bag, her bloody jeans and a t-shirt. She showers as best she can. There are sticky grey squares on her chest and forearms. She wets the dressing on her arm and peels it off.

Her fingers ache and she gently wipes soap over herself and rinses off a lot of the blood. She closes the taps and stands in front of the mirror. She fingers the precise diagram of her ribs, the mottled bruising on one side starting to yellow. She touches the white finger-lines above her slightly drooping breasts and lightly pushes one of the staples in her arm. Puss leaks from it, the colour of water as it collects on a jar of mustard.

She washes her socks and pants in the sink, wrings them out and gets dressed. She drapes her wet socks over the railing at the foot of her bed.

...

The psychiatric nurse comes round again. Katherine composes herself, back straight, hands in her lap.

The woman says that she thinks it would be a good idea for Katherine to spend a few days in their other hospital.

"I don't think I need to. I feel okay."

The nurse holds her hand out for Katherine's and takes her fingers.

"You're still shaking, Katherine."

“A little, yes. The pills are helping.”

“Yes, they will help.”

The nurse sighs. “Did you just want some help, Katherine? Is that why you’re here?”

...

Early the next morning she sneaks off the ward, goes through a set of double doors next to the Costa downstairs and out to a small square courtyard with netting high across it and a square of blue sky beyond that. A plane goes across. A trellis pinned to one of the side walls, a vine woven amongst it. Dusty mauve pebbles on the ground. The air is fresh and lovely.

Katherine smokes a cigarette, her first in three days. The first neat exhalation elates her and light, pure hunger soars and her happiness spirals off into the bright blue sky.

When she gets back to the ward the nurse says, “You’ve had a wash?”

“Yes.”

“Is better, yes?”

“Yes.”

...

She has nothing to read but a day-old *Mirror*. She plugs in her dead phone and turns it on. The display lightens and registers some missed calls. Her father, her aunt, Joe. She calls Joe.

“Hello.”

“Hello, Katherine.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes,” he says. “I’m okay. I saw your dad. He said you’d left.”

“Yes.”

Pause.

“You got stabbed.”

“Yes,” he says. “I did. Are you coming home?”

...

The Nigerian nurse comes by with her discharge papers. Katherine takes them and smiles. She folds them neatly. The nurse holds Katherine’s chin and makes their eyes meet.

“I don’t want to see you back here like this. Okay?”

“Okay.”

Part Two

1.

“I told him I was working on something and that I was going to try very hard never to treat anyone like that again. We shook hands and I walked home. It was a clear night, like we rarely get in London. I said thank you. I didn’t know to whom or to what I was giving thanks, but it felt like the right thing to do. I cried and then I went to bed and I slept for ten hours. When I woke up I was a better person. That’s how it works.”

When he finishes there’s a pause. The secretary, a young woman, wipes her eye and smiles. She opens the meeting. Katherine says, “My name’s Katherine and I’m an alcoholic.”

The room says, “Hi, Katherine.”

...

There is a woman sitting on the stairs with her fist around a black cane.

“New neighbour,” she says.

“Yes,” says K. “I’m your new neighbour.”

“Welcome.”

“Thank you.”

The woman is very fat, she has a hard job standing. “Can’t help you with your bags,” she says.

Katherine nods and puts out a hand.

“It’s okay,” says the woman. “I can manage.” Her eyes are milky. She smells sour.

“You’re upstairs,” she says.

“Yes,” says K.

“I’m downstairs.”

The overhead lights are out. A lamp on a small dresser in the hall, junk mail scattered across the floor. As Katherine is taking up the last of her things the woman waddles out into the hallway holding a kitten by its scruff, tapping the side of the staircase with her stick.

“Got you this,” she says.

“Thank you.”

Katherine puts the cat on the kitchen floor. The walls are bare and clean. The laminate flooring creaks underfoot. There’s a couch that folds out, a round dining table under the bay window. She checks the cupboards and finds a box of Cheerios. She tips some onto the linoleum and watches as the kitten sniffs the cereal and carefully bites it. The kitten is alive. She watches it. Cars go by outside. She thinks of last night’s meeting, of what he said about the sky. There’s some raspberry tea by the kettle and she makes tea, shifts up the sash window and sits beside it. Peckham, south London. A purple-orange glow smudges the sky. This is where she lives. It is summer again. She feels like calling someone and telling them she’s sorry. She thinks of her father. Instead of sitting alone she’d be sitting with someone, the person who partly made her. A mirror. She opens the camera on her phone and flips it.

You look different to yourself, Katherine.

She texts Joe. She presses send and then rests in the silence.

She finds an ironing board in the cupboard under the stairs. She knocks on her neighbour's door and when no-one comes she shouts through the letterbox, "I'm borrowing this ironing board!"

She holds the stiff letterbox open until a voice comes back. "Okay." Pause, then, "I don't iron anyway."

...

She folds out the couch and looks through the airing cupboard for some bedding. She finds two sheets and two quilt covers and makes a bed. The kitten paws at the bedding so she lifts it onto her chest. They eye one another. She decides it's best the kitten isn't here but it's late and she can't return it now. The kitten mewls. She can't sleep. She drags the bedding onto the kitchen floor and the kitten curls up beside her.

She wakes in the night. She isn't sure where she is and then she is sure, and the sudden certainty of knowing where she is disorients her. She wants to see if the raspberry tea is still there so she turns on the light and holds the box. She reads some of the writing on it, puts it back, takes the Cheerios from the cupboard, the bottle of salt, and then she laughs at herself, a dry, pattering laugh that is estranged from her as soon as she emits it. She sits cross-legged on the floor in the middle of the nest she has made for herself. She strokes the kitten's slippery ribs. Soon all of it fades. She sits at the table and there is nothing remarkable about it. These are her thighs. So what? She eats some rice pudding and a slice of cheese. She allows herself to feel cheerful as she brushes her teeth at the kitchen sink then she goes back to bed and very soon she must be asleep because the next thing there is is daylight and an awakening into it. Her thigh is cold with piss and she thinks it's hers. She pushes the cover away and the cat, startled, shakes its head, a plush fluttering sound, like pigeons from the

rafters. She puts the bedding in the washing machine and showers then she puts on her ironed shirt and some jeans. She has a job, a little place of her own.

“You are a person like other people,” she says.

...

She garlands herself with her pass and signs the keys out at security. She goes down the two flights into the ground core, punches a green button and comes out of a side door into the hall. A film plays on a big canvas screen covering the far wall. She blinks a couple of times, staggering back, momentarily disorientated by the delimiting frame of her vision, a frame from which she cannot step clear. The camera pans across a crowd of faces, side-on. They stare ahead, rapt, as an orange light pulses against them. There is a faint, gathering roar and then the image cuts to a dazzle of white glitter sparkling as it spreads towards the edges of the frame, and then the glitter is sucked inwards and a kaleidoscope of orange shapes twist and expand, filling the screen, justifying or creating the quiet rapture in her heart. She is so moved that she turns away from it and looks up at the high ceiling, the metal girders, a bridge, a complicated geometry housing this, holding her. The film ends. Blackness. Her body disappears into itself and she is not here for a second or two.

...

Her department is on the eighth floor of the new building. She uses the staff lift. She plonks the keys on the counter and walks around the room. As she moves, the strung bulbs flick on. The windows are angled and high. The north-facing windows look out over the flat roof of the gallery's original building, the river after it, St. Paul's Cathedral after that. She is high up and the horizon is a careful bulge. It's quiet like this for a while and then it is time to pick up the money. She takes the lifts down to zero, gets turned about in the corridors, finds the cash room and becomes peopled for a while.

...

She is standing out back next to a roll-cage, ticking off a delivery. She realises that she has not been herself for a while. She rotates her wrist and pays attention to the time. The story of the tally, the task at hand, suddenly has nothing to do with her. She's been busy, distracted, it happens, and she doubled herself in the process, and now she has caught up with the self she left behind and is unsure what to do with her. She stands here silently for a while, looking at the boxes of drinks, the stack of wooden highchairs against the wall. It occurs to her that this was, perhaps, a reason to drink.

You deal with her.

She opens a box of wine and withdraws a bottle. It's heavy. The glass is very smooth and cold. She looks at the bottle and tries to equate its mute solidity, the fact of itself, to something as intangible as a reason to drink it.

...

The afternoon is very quiet so she sends everyone else home and finishes the shift with Chris. Chris says, "I'm just trying to work really hard so I don't think about my cat."

"That's sensible," she says.

"Yes," he says. "Because fifteen is really old for a cat." He holds his hand by his shoulders and bends his fingers at odd angles as he speaks. His ginger hair is uncombed. He does work hard and when everyone's gone and the place is tidy she tells him to take a beer from the fridge. She takes a Diet Coke and wanders around the gallery. She looks at some of the work. It is nice to be in the gallery but it's the same as outside and outside there's also the sky and the sound of the trees.

She crosses the hall on the bridge and goes up to level six. The long corridor leads left into the East Room, which is big, square and almost empty. The walls are glass on two sides. The view is spectacular. There is a desk in the very middle of the room and three chairs stacked against the wall. She brings a chair to the desk and sits down, looking out of the windows, the cathedral in front, a few small boats on the river, the city spread out. She lets the still grandeur settle her thoughts until they are poised and quiet. Everything in the gallery is arranged very precisely. She feels herself balance on something and then she notes down the book's early scenes in bullet points. The B&B room. Drinking. The persistent violence.

There are too many words.

She remembers the scratchpad she took from the restaurant while she helped out at lunch. She takes it from her back pocket and writes on the first narrow page, *A crossed window. A flat counterpane. The wall scorched around the plug-socket.*

The shadow of a deity passes over the water.

She writes on the scratchpad for a while. There are no clocks on the wall and then she remembers the cathedral and looks at the time on its face and time has, of course, passed. She feels very strong and assumes that working makes her strong. She walks back down the corridor, to the restaurant at its opposite end. Magda is still here. She is loading the long couches onto flat trolleys and moving them to the bank of lifts. She pauses when she sees K., raises a hand and flaps the front of her shirt. Katherine helps her for a while and then they both take a can of lemonade from the fridge and stand by the windows, sweaty and tired.

"I'm leaving," says K.

"On holiday," says Magda.

Pause.

“Yes.”

“You are coming back?”

Is she coming back?

“Yes,” she says. “I have a visa.”

“And a job,” says Magda. They smile and they stand here in the fading light sipping their lemonades. A clear feeling of love angles through her and it is for Magda because Magda is here. They move the small restaurant tables to the window and then Katherine says, “I’m going to take a bowl, from the kitchen. For my cat.”

“You don’t have a bowl?” asks Magda.

“No.”

“Maybe take one for yourself as well.”

So they fetch a couple of bowls and then Magda gives her some cutlery and a plate and she asks if K. wants some food.

“I’m not hungry,” says Katherine.

“You should go shopping, Katherine. Make your house like a home.”

Cristina is leaving and they have gathered in the staff garden. When Magda and Katherine come out a noise goes up, they are pleased. The two women sit among their staff. Cristina passes round some plastic cups and a bottle of Prosecco and they stay in the garden until it gets dark.

...

She cleans up after the kitten then she showers and sits at the table with some tea. She checks her emails. The opening chapters of the novel have been shortlisted for a prize

awarded to a work in progress. She reads the email a number of times, pleased to realise that she would like to read at the awards ceremony, that she would even like to win. For a moment, the idea of some praise gains a slippery purchase in her heart. She finds the manuscript in one of the boxes, unlooses the blue ribbon and reads the extract she sent, then she snaps the pages of the scratchpad free of the book and spreads them across the table. She types them up, changing the margins so that the small tight passages are narrow and compact. She spends a long time moving them around, adding to them, abstracting the novel from itself, rescuing it. Isolated like this, the sequences balance, poised and tense. Each moment exists, and in the moment that it exists there is nothing other than itself, just the semblance or shadow of the organising force that compels them.

When she is tired she browses the internet. She sees that her cousin has invited her to a wedding. She clicks on the event's page on Facebook and sees herself on a list of those attending and she opens her profile and looks at it for a while. She begins to fill out some of the boxes, to write about herself, then she reads it back. She deletes it all, puts her phone on speaker and calls her father's house. She listens to the phone ring and imagines herself in the empty house, imagines herself when she was young, creating and enjoying an expanding gap between the little girl she was and the woman she is, and there is a sudden flush of sadness, a bottoming-out feeling, as though in a lift, and she is sad for how little evidence there is of a life in this flat. She has barely unpacked. She realises, then forgets the realisation, that the way to unpack a flat and care about competitions is to clarify yourself to yourself, and that is what things like Facebook are for.

...

She is up very early. She checks on the crockery she took from work and polishes a teaspoon with the tail of her shirt. She bought a fruit-bowl. She eats one of the apples in it,

fingers the change under the fruit and thinks of Russia, the Russia fund, a bowl of silver she kept above the cooker in the caravan, her hands too unsteady to pay for the beers with change.

She puts the cat in one of the cardboard boxes and uses a breadknife to cut airholes in the side, then she laughs and removes the cat and finishes putting the holes in the box. She folds the bed away and eats some cereal from her new bowl and she opens the sash window wide and smokes a cigarette.

...

She leaves the cat in the Patron's Room and comes in at lunchtime to feed it some slices of beef. She sits with it for a while, looking at the old building from the narrow windows. She sits on one of the pale pistachio couches. She is so still and quiet and the kitten is so small. It is more than she can bear.

She asks Chris to come to the Patron's Room and he sees the cat and says, "Ah!"

He asks its name.

"I don't know yet," she says.

He kneels by the cat and the cat comes to him.

"You can have her if you like."

"It's a girl."

"Yes."

He nods and says thanks and she leaves them to play for a while.

2.

Looking out over the bypass, the hills beyond, the underlit
cupola of the museum she will visit (green, a green light)
strong and clear through the wooded hillside.

...

There's an archway into the small dining room, a penknife, keys and a shrivelled apple in the fruit-bowl. The bookcases are empty but otherwise everything's the same. Her mother didn't own much.

She goes through to the front room and turns on the light. There's a photo on top of the gas fire that wasn't there before. Katherine, the child she was, sixteen and moping in a prom dress, her shoulders sticking out of it like a coat-hanger. Joe stands next to her in a dark blue suit with a spray at the lapel, arms by his sides. Both of them look as though they're not sure where they are or what, if anything, is expected of them. She interrupts herself reaching out to touch it. A pang. She wonders if she's been making it up all along, if she really has always been a bit sad and lost or if she's just been acting that way for want of a better idea. She wonders if she's happy.

Yes, she decides. I'm happy.

Crockery for one bone dry on the draining board. She turns off the light and stands in the darkness. Before this was her father's house it was her grandmother's house and she feels as though she remembers being here as a child, though there is nothing distinct in the memory, just the impression of something passed, like a film she cannot remember but knows she has seen.

...

The caravan at the bottom of the garden is unlocked and she puts her things on the small double bed. The windows are baked and it smells like a greenhouse. There's a small sink and a desktop stove, a kettle, a fridge. She would come and stay sometimes, her cousins too. A bolthole for children careening through adolescent crises. She wonders if that's what this is, a crisis.

If *what* is a crisis?

Pause.

"This," she says.

She thinks about the last time she was here, waiting on a detox, drinking, her mother drinking in the house behind her, their tied carrier bags side by side at the bins.

The water's on. She drinks from the tap and pees in the tiny toilet. She tries the kettle but there's no electric so she sits on the steps and smokes a cigarette, feeling empty and tired, the cacophonous echo of the hospital in her ears. She strokes her bandaged wrist. The moon is bright. Stars are out. The scouring tang of salt air on the warm breeze is an unspecific drawing at her heart, a feeling of homesickness which is exaggerated by being here. She takes the keys to her old Micra from the fruit-bowl.

...

The car smells of burnt oil so she scrolls the window down. It's nice to be back in a car. She drives past the council house she grew up in and pulls over just down the road. Her parking is awkward, she cannot get a feel for the width of the car and she bumps the kerb. She walks back to the house. The curtains are closed. The garden is much neater than it was, the front door new. There is no way of meeting herself. The video shop across the road closed long ago. It is an off-licence now. She remembers telling Kevin, the manager, her friend, that

she was going away, travelling, that he bought her a suitcase and wished her luck. She remembers sitting in his office and talking to him about school, about college, that he encouraged her to go to university, that he thought she was very bright, which was true and still is.

She goes inside and says to the girl behind the till, “You know where Kevin is?”

“Kevin who?”

“He owned the video shop. Him and Mark.”

“Cor,” says the girl. “That’s donkey years.”

“Yes,” says Katherine.

“I don’t know. You need anything?”

She shakes her head.

She drives down Low Road towards town and the seafront. One side of the hill is still a field of ripe corn which leads to the river and then the marshes and the sea but there’s a new housing estate on the other side. Most of the houses are still empty, unlit and neat. It looks like an abandoned film set. Poised streetlights line the road, thin saplings in front of the gardens. She turns the radio dial, sketches through white noise and finds some music.

...

We look at the underlit cupola of the K museum. Later,
having looked at it, she visits the K museum.

...

She shop is bright and empty. A young guy with a fuzzy mop of red hair stands at the tills, picking his fingernails with a plastic spoon. She wanders the aisles, amusingly clueless. Everything seems bafflingly unnecessary. The booze is stacked in bright fridges at the end of the shop. She thinks about the detox, about a bunch of them being taken to the supermarket three days in, wandering about, dazed by the meds, absently filling baskets with exotic fruit juice and peanuts and sweets, ambushed into panic by a gold-lit bank of rosé.

She buys some boiled sweets and tosses them through the passenger window, proud of herself, then she gets in the car and drives quickly down the High Street. She sees Kyle standing out front the chicken shop with some mates, a case of Stellas under the window. She thinks about pulling over, asking him where Joe is, why they fought, but she knows there isn't really a reason and that if there was the impetus behind it has vanished, that it would be pointless trying to recover anything.

She turns up Cliff Road and drives past Sharon's, the back door standing open, the kitchen lit. She imagines pulling over, shouting up the stairs, "Got anything?"

"Yeah, come in babe."

She could pick up, go back to the off-licence, back to the caravan, safe, just like those seven, eight weeks a while ago.

She stops under the stout stone bust of Queen Victoria and follows the zig-zag footpath down to the promenade. The tide's halfway up. She sits on the damp sand and closes her eyes. She concentrates on the water. White lace breakers gently fizz and dissolve. A seagull picks its way along the shoreline, flexes its wingspan and flings a squawk at her. She waves her hand.

You're sober, she thinks.

The waves meet at the end of the concrete groin, lock fingers and glide along its back. Looking at the sea makes her feel a little sick so she stares at the stones and she and the stones do nothing for a while. She clacks a sweet against her teeth.

When she gets back to the car her phone is ringing.

...

Her father is standing at the door. She smiles easily enough and then she remembers her arm is bandaged and she touches her wrist, missing her sleeves, and as she walks towards him her hands feel useless. The hollow, hand-cupped coo of a woodpigeon.

“Got your licence back?”

“No,” she says.

He holds out his hand. She gives the keys over.

He smiles and shakes his head. He embraces her. He breathes into her hair then kisses her forehead and closes the cuddle again. In his arms her bones feel fragile. She could easily cry, so she does.

...

He sits by the fire. There’s an open can on his side table and an empty lying flat, dented in the middle and punched with a few holes, a makeshift pipe.

She sits on the lumpy futon. The TV’s on, a David Attenborough show.

She feels anxious and strange. They leave the light off and he mutes the TV and shifts in the armchair. He faces her and smiles. He’s let his crew-cut grow out a little and his hair is

white. There's a clear hearing aid in his ear. He looks at her arms and then away from them. He swigs his beer and half stands, suddenly, saying, "Did you want a drink, Katherine?"

She shakes her head.

"Where's your stuff?"

"I've put it in the van."

"You can stay in the house if you want."

"I don't mind the van."

"We'll run some leccy out in a bit."

"Thank you."

"Joe's been out there a few times."

Pause.

"Been helping me at work a bit, here and there."

"He didn't say."

"You seen him?"

"No."

"Thought you might have visited him. In the hospital."

Her stomach knots in the pause. There is tension here, things unsaid, and though none of it is important she is unable to will it away, to look gently at him and convince him to leave all of this behind. She'd like this to tip into something intimate, something easy. She

doesn't want to talk about Joe or her drinking or the state she was in when she left. She just wants to be his daughter for a while.

He runs his hand through his hair. Dennis comes back to her, the boy from the room. A fragment of dinner-plate splitting his cheek, a tight flash of blood. It is also the memory of Joe stepping out of the blood as it pools on the floorboards. The hospital appointment, the purple sky, Joe sitting on the bench out front, waiting for her. The flushed sound of the word. She touches her belly and finds a coiled image of her pale, cowed womb. She lightly punches the cushion at her back.

“You sure I can't get you anything?”

She clenches her teeth and the nearness is so exquisite it hurts. She is surprised by a tight flash of malice in her voice. “No,” she says. “Thank you.”

Her hands are unsteady and her tendons ache. She lights her cigarette and sits back. There's a plain calendar on the far wall. It's July. It's been a year since the detox. She wonders what he thinks about that, what she has been trying to do.

What *has* she been trying to do?

She feels herself closing off. She flicks ash into her palm and smudges it across her jeans.

“How's mum?”

“She's okay. Far as I know. You haven't spoken to Joe?”

“No. I saw Kyle.”

“Did you?”

He nods but doesn't really react, and he's right. She saw Kyle, and that's all. And then he says, "What happened to your arms, Katherine? What have you done?"

She looks at her hands. She remembers cutting her wrists at seventeen, her father lifting her from the bath and then dropping to his knees in the hallway, the animal pain behind his voice as he groaned, "Why do you do this, Katherine?"

"I don't know what I'm doing," she says. She nods her head, trying to find something else. "I was drinking too much again. I was in the hospital for a while... I can smell the sea here. I've missed it." When she says it, it becomes true. She has missed the sea and she wants to watch it right now, to stand before it. She feels that drawing sense of homesickness again and realises it must be the tide, the moon.

She thinks about the B&B room, about her dreams. Sitting in the yard with the sun burning her exposed shins. Driving through the Czech Republic, lakes, a castle. Pulling into an empty gravel car park, a bottle of warm liqueur, a sandwich wrapped in foil. Lake Bled in Slovenia. A shadow moving across the water. The feeling that she was looking for someone whose impression she saw in the empty lobbies of the hotel rooms she stayed in. The feeling that she was both the person looking for another and the person being looked for, as though making notes on the possibility of herself. She thinks of the children playing, the dusty concrete under her palms. The insistent magnetism of empty days, the strange not-here-ness of it all.

"I thought you were okay," he says.

"I am."

He turns the television off and sits forward. She wants to drink so badly her eyes well up. He looks at her. He sees her frightened expression and though she is isn't faking it she

feels like she is as soon as she realises that it's worked, that he's backed down, softened. He just sighs and says, almost smiling, "Why is it so hard to get to the bottom of you?"

"I don't know why it's like that."

"I always worry about you, Katherine. I'm always worried."

"I'm sorry."

"I just want you to be okay."

She squashes her cigarette dead in his ashtray and they're quiet for a bit.

"Your mum misses you," he says.

"Does she?"

"Of course she does. Have you spoken to her?"

"She called. A while ago. I missed it."

"You're as bad as each other."

"How?"

He smiles at her consternation. She smiles too. "She can be hostile, don't you think?"

"Pot, kettle," he says.

"You think I'm hostile?"

"No."

"She makes me feel like I'm making it up."

"Making what up?"

“Everything.”

Pause.

“How’s Sandra,” she says.

He shrugs. He doesn’t ask her, *Are you seeing anyone, Katherine? Is there a boy?*

It would be insensitive somehow.

“Does she stay here?”

“Sometimes. I’m mostly at hers. You’re lucky to have caught me at home.”

“Did you have an affair?”

“When?”

“I don’t know. It just occurred to me. I never asked.”

“I noticed.”

“Would I like her?”

“I have no idea. Do you need any money?”

“No,” she says. “I’ve got some money. Can I stay here?”

“Of course you can stay here.”

...

He runs an extension out to the van, turns on the lights and sits with her for a minute.

It’s cool, almost chilly.

“I feel rotten leaving you out here.”

“I’m alright.”

He kisses her on the cheek.

...

She lies on the bed, on top of the covers. The window’s open. She watches the fringe of the net curtain spell the breeze. She won’t be able to sleep, not without meds, not without booze.

The awful black anxiety settles in, uncoiling itself in the pit of her stomach, steadily intensifying like a slow-release poison. She pulls her knees close and moans. Her ribs ache. Her arm hurts. She feels homesick and guilty and alone. She cries quietly. The night is very long. This is how you get better.

3.

A double row of aspens (preceding the history) tremble in
the breeze, the sedate path between them centring a sightline,
giving it poise.

...

She stands at the front and sings along to the hymns. They have a party afterwards at Greenacres. It's overcast. There's a marquee, a barbecue. She introduces herself to people who tell her they've known her for years. The cousins, all boys, are around her age. They are all married. Most of them are drug dealers. They wear slim suits and double-cuffed shirts. She sits on a deck chair with a little bowl of paella and watches the children play and the older people, old friends, their parents, chat amongst themselves and drink Prosecco from plastic flutes. They are ushered inside the clubhouse for the speeches. The best man, the groom's brother, gives a speech about their upbringing, about their boxing coach coming to see their father one day, finding a council house with no carpets and no furniture and three feral kids beating the shit out of each other. He talks about the misfortunes they've had, their time spent away, how they always had each other's backs. Everyone cries and cheers. K. takes a walk around the park. The gate at the end is fastened with a padlock and she tries a random combination and it works and she follows a narrow path through high brambles and comes out on the marshes. Clouds gather on the horizon.

...

It's dark when she gets back and she chats to her cousins and their wives and when she gets bored she drives up the road to her father's, finds a key in the gas meter and lets herself in. Her mother is sitting at the kitchen table in the dark. K. turns on the light and sits with her. Her mother has lost lots of weight. She's in a pink vest and jeans, her hands are mottled with liver spots. Her face is drawn and Katherine allows herself to stop trying to look

for the woman her mother was and it is easy to do this. Like coals shifting in the grate, something collapses peacefully inside her.

“I know I have a problem,” says her mother.

K. lets her talk and then she asks what she's doing here and her mother says, “I was waiting for you.”

Katherine nods as if to say, *Okay*.

After a while her mother says, “I came for some things.”

“What things?”

“Dad’s things. Photos. Some of my things are here.”

K. stands. She gets some water and goes out to the garden. A stone Buddha, overgrown with grass, sits against the back fence.

Her mother fell over as she got out the cab. Katherine watched from the gates. She went round the back of the church, washed her hands at a tap in the wall. She looked down the narrow path, a double row of aspens moving in the wind.

She goes through to the front room, looks along the empty bookshelves then opens a browser on her phone and asks it for a definition. She says, “The OED has this for aspens: *A poplar tree with small rounded long-stalked leaves that tremble in the breeze.*”

“Yes,” says her mother.

Aspens then.

“Are you selling the house?”

“It's not mine,” says Katherine.

“Maybe he left it you in his will.”

Katherine isn't sure, if there was a will she doesn't know anything about it.

“I was on trial,” she says. “When he died.”

“I know.” Her mother nods her head. “Maybe the others will want it,” she says.

“Yes,” says Katherine.

That’s what happens, she assumes. Someone died and left her father the house. Her father dies and someone else takes the house, or they sell it and it gets old, and the people get old, and that’s all.

“We could live here,” says her mum. “You and I.”

“You should stay here.”

“No,” says her mother, then she sits still, eyes glazed, head dipped. “Your friend is out,” she says. “Kyle.”

Katherine nods.

“After all you did for him, he ended up in jail anyway.”

“Yes.”

“I never understand why you lied for him, Katherine. Why you got him off with something like that. Did you know that I knew? That I knew you lied on the stand. Again. You know what he did to your father? That he was here, in this house, when your father died?” She needs a direction for this bitterness and so she has found it here. “You betrayed your friend, Katherine. And it’s not generous, what you did for Kyle. I don’t think you’re generous at all. You’re arrogant. You think you’re better than other people...” She drifts off.

“I have an amends to make to you,” says Katherine. She tries to push something from one side of her mind to another. What sounds can she make that will articulate this rebalancing of her feelings for her mother and her mother’s feelings for her?

She stands at her shoulder and her mother does not look up at her. Katherine reaches for her hand and takes it in hers so that they are holding hands in the quiet stillness of a kitchen. She finds something truthful inside her, a shape, difficult to pry clear of itself, and it is very clumsy and inaccurate to say of this shape, “I love you, and I’m sorry.”

...

She has a shower and sits in her old bedroom and when she comes down again her mother is drinking vodka from a glass teacup and she has some photos spread across the table.

“Look at these,” she says.

K. stays in the doorway. “I’m going to go.”

...

She drives back to London, parks near the flat and then walks up the Rye to the New Cross Road, up to Deptford, into Greenwich. She walks to St. Peter’s, sits on the concrete steps leading down to the church hall and smokes a cigarette.

She opens up. There’s a pool table in the lobby with a plyboard sheet over it and then a set of steps into the main hall. It’s a shabby room, low-ceilinged, the windows narrow and frosted. She puts the chairs out and sets a desk at the end of the room. She gets the clear box of tea bits from the kitchen and sets up, puts a couple of kettles on to boil, then she stands in the empty room and the plain-faced wall clock shows how early she still is. She puts a teapot and some coffee and a bowl of sugar on the table and she makes a cup of tea and eats two biscuits. A while ago she was home and now she’s here, nibbling a biscuit. It seems very funny, so she laughs.

...

It is a ninety-minute meeting but it feels longer. She is grateful for the tea. There are lots of gaps in the sharing and it’s nice to sit in the quiet. Debbie sits in the middle of the row, her feet on a second chair, ankles crossed, flats paired neatly by the leg. She rests her hands on her pregnant belly, eyes closed. There is another pause and Katherine surprises herself by saying her name aloud. She tells them about going home, seeing old friends, people she used to know because she was standing next to them, who are older, as she is. She pauses to look at her hands but she isn’t finished, she is enjoying the sound of her voice, feeling it move

across the room. She tells them that she found it hard to think of them as the same people, to make sense of the gathering, but that she felt kindness nonetheless, and she reminds herself that she always has this feeling, a feeling that she supposes is a kind of love.

Debbie comes in right at the end. She tells the room that her husband has left, that he was sleeping with someone else. Katherine likes listening to Debbie, she speaks very well. She has written down a few of the things Debbie has said over the months that Katherine has been coming here, and now Debbie tells them that she is very angry but she is trying to maintain a healthy acceptance of the fact that her husband's actions are a result of his own insecurities and fears. She is trying, despite her sadness, despite her shaken confidence, to believe that she has done nothing to hurt or upset anybody, and she says this in her clear and steely voice, which wavers only very gently. She tells the room that a drink has not crossed her mind.

Katherine is very moved. It is very beautiful that Debbie does this, that she believes as much as it is possible to believe – as sober and intelligent as she is – that by demonstrating such poise and dignity she invests not just her own self but the very project of being human with a kind of grandeur that it – the project, the fact – of course cannot accommodate, doesn't deserve, but the conviction of her efforts are nonetheless moving, and Katherine is touched by a very dignified sense of sadness.

The secretary reminds everybody of the yellow card. "Who you see here," he says, "what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here. And why's that George?"

George pipes up from the back. "Nobody likes a grass!"

She helps stack the chairs and then she collects the few paper cups left behind on the carpet and puts them in the bin. A number of people have gathered around Debbie and so

Katherine leaves them to it, she goes for a wee and as she heads outside Debbie touches her elbow and says, "Do you have a minute, Katherine?"

She nods.

"Come on," says Debbie. "Come sit in the car."

She puts the heaters on and warm air blows across their laps. She reaches across Katherine, drops the glovebox and takes out a little blue bottle of stop-smoking lozenges. She offers her one.

"Give me indigestion," says Katherine.

"Yeah," says Debs. "Me too. Better than a fag though."

Debbie looks through the windscreen and a tatty fox stands in the road looking back at them, its eyes violet in the moonlight.

"I stole something," says Katherine.

"Give it back," says Debs.

"I did."

"Well."

"Well," says Katherine. "Someone's looking for me."

"You gonna get pinched?"

"No," says Katherine. "I did. It happened already."

"So what's the problem?"

K. shrugs.

“Phone your sponsor,” says Debbie.

“I haven’t got one.”

“Get one. But don’t ask me.”

“Okay. I am making my amends.”

“You should practice doing it the other way.”

“Forgiving others, you mean.”

“Yes,” says Debs. “Do you feel like you’ve been wronged?”

“By whom?”

“By anyone.”

She thinks about it.

“I didn’t think so,” says Debbie. “I don’t know if you can make an amends if you don’t understand why people need to hear them. I don’t think you forgive people. I think it doesn’t occur to you that there’s ever anything to forgive.”

“Why did Paul leave?”

“He’s scared.”

“He doesn’t trust people.”

“I know,” says Debs. “You’re a strange girl, Katherine.”

“I hit someone with an axe and when I went to trial I lied and didn’t go to prison.”

“It’s good you didn’t go to prison.”

Pause. Debbie is very beautiful, she has dark skin, her wrists are very thin, her eyes are wide. Katherine sits there with Debbie's sadness for a while and then Debbie says, "Why did you tell me?"

"What?"

"About the man and the axe. The fucking axe. You forgot?"

Katherine laughs. "No," she says. "I remembered. I just wondered if I should tell you. But it doesn't matter."

"No," says Debs. "I don't think it matters. You could do something nice for the man."

"Go see him."

"Yeah. But don't knock on his door and say, 'I'm the dozy bint what knocked you on the 'ead with a axe.'"

"I wasn't going to."

"Good. It's about balance, Katherine. Balance something bad with something good, not to satisfy some divine sense of justice, just to give yourself a bit of peace."

"I am peaceful."

"So why'd you drink?"

"I don't know."

Pause.

"Do you never wonder, Katherine, why, when you picked up a drink, you couldn't stop? Why you woke up in the morning and the obsession to drink was the only thought in your head?"

Katherine nods. Does she think about that?

“What will make you not drink again?”

“Do you want me to say God?”

“I don’t want you to say anything. I’m just being provocative... You want to improve your self-esteem,” says Debs, “do estimable things.”

“I heard that before.”

“It’s old as the hills.”

“I don’t think I have low self-esteem.”

“I don’t think you have much of a self. Not the way the rest of us have it.”

“His son is in love with me. My friend took me to that house to get back at him, the son. To get back at me.”

“What did you do?”

“I was pregnant.”

“Ah.”

Katherine laughs.

“That’s funny?”

“No,” says Katherine. “It was very sad, getting rid of it. It’s funny that...”

“What?”

“That people carry this around with them... Kyle was there when my father died. He’s the one who called me.”

“Then what happened?”

There’s a long pause and it feels over so Katherine opens the door and Debbie puts out a hand.

“Don’t go yet.”

“Okay.”

It’s quiet again. Debbie cracks a window so they can hear the birds.

“I like having you close to me, Katherine. I’m in so much pain.”

“Because he left you.”

“Yes,” says Debs. “Because he left, and I’m carrying his child. Gutless fucker.”

“I think you’ll be a good mother.”

“What about the kid who is looking for you.”

“Kyle.”

“Do you need to forgive him?”

“People are capable of violence,” says Katherine. “And so violence happens.”

“It’s a strange kind of equality,” says Debbie. “But I’m not sure it’s any real kind of love.”

Pause.

“Right,” says Debs. “I gottta love you and tell you to get out of my car. Less you want a lift?”

“Where are you going?”

“Blackheath.”

“I like going over the heath at night.”

“You live in the other direction.”

“Yes. Goodnight Debs.”

“Goodnight. Be well, yeah.”

4.

She walks up to Beach Road Stores to buy bread and Marmite and Weetabix and back at the van she makes herself breakfast. Four days dry and her hands still shake. She sits with her food on the narrow violet cushion of the L-shaped sofa and drinks a cup of sweet tea. She pretends that she is in the hospital, that the nurses are humming as they change the beds around her.

...

Her father isn't home and she potters around, restless. He's growing weed in her old room. The overhead lights are hot and the window is covered with foil-backed cladding. Some of her folders of writing are stacked on the scaffold-board shelves at the back of the room. She finds a couple of plastic crates in the airing cupboard, one full of her old videos, the other packed with clothes. She sorts out a stack of films, some dresses, chooses a few books and takes everything down to the front room.

She makes a coffee and lies on the couch. She thinks of her parents' marriage, that it's ended. She tries to measure this, the way things are, against the way they were. The day presses against the window. The thought doesn't move.

She reads for a while, trying to nurture and intensify a sense of emotional kinship and failing. She lets the book flop closed. She remembers her coffee and sips it. She was startled by these books, captivated. She went abroad, to Prague, to Slovenia, Vienna, Hungary, aiming for Russia, carrying the weight of these books in her heart, forever missing something, unable, unequipped, to translate herself onto the pages of the notebook she kept, with Russia an end-point at which she knew she would never arrive, a metaphor so plain it

stood as a blank obelisk before her. The books seem tiresome now and though she knows that she was once unbearably moved by them, the memory feels like a lie.

She puts the thick book on the coffee table and looks at it. She squashes the cigarette dead in the ashtray and scratches her ankle.

...

She walks up past the sea defences to the last ribbon of beach before the bay curves back on itself, the path ends and there is a broad expanse of marshland separating her from Walton. She strips down to her underwear and closes her eyes. The salty breeze moves over her. Sand-flies pat against her shins. She strokes her hips and then holds her hands at her sides and vitality moves effortlessly through her, unbowed and pure. Her thoughts try to messy it up so she looks at the sky. She smiles. The tide is coming in but it's still some way off. She picks her way over the stones. Waves pulse forward and move around her ankles. The water is cold. She wades out to her knees and then her waist and then she falls forward into the water, giving it her weight with a gasp. Her body makes a watery tinkling sound as she breaststrokes out. She scoops sea and turns onto her back. Some big purplish clouds are smeared at the corners or underneath with a bright sunset, the sky around them still blue and still young-looking.

She pokes her toes out of the water and floats on her back. She's playing. It's precious.

...

She sits against the pillbox with the towel around her shoulders, her fingers stiffening. She feels sad just like she did when she was younger, when this pure, exquisite feeling was

too pronounced to contain. She takes the can of lemonade from her bag. It is sweet and fizzy and warm.

This is what I want, she thinks. I want to share my life with someone.

...

She walks past her father's road and up to Greenacres Holiday Camp. A small lawn in front of the clubhouse, the grass long and plush. She sits at a picnic table. Some kids play on the drive and there's the smell of a barbecue on the air. Loose white clouds across the blue like a handful of tossed flour. The club's patio doors are open. A group of men, some young, some old, are sitting in a row playing ukuleles. The smell of lager drifts out with the music and the smell glows through her like sunshine. She's thoughtless for a while. A guy in high-vis trousers and a padded shirt walks up the drive with a spade. He pauses, props the spade against his thigh and lights a cigarette. She says hello. He nods. She follows him to the end of the park and watches him neatly cut turf away from the back fence. He slides a panel loose. There are iron railings on the ground.

"Do you need any help?"

"Set this gate up," he says.

She helps. He goes away for a while and comes back with a black chain, a padlock.

"Set that combination," he says. She does. She pulls the chain taut.

...

Kyle gets out of a small burgundy Peugeot. He drags a battered suitcase off the back seat and picks it up with one hand, leaning left, green veins jumping up his skinny arm. The car drives off and toots Katherine as it passes and her heart flutters when Kyle shields his

eyes to look at her. The fields on their left buzz with crickets. Someone whistles and a Labrador jumps up in the ripe barley, its ears flapping.

He drops the case and puts his hand on his shoulder as he circles it.

“What’s that?” she says.

“Metal. Swapping it for some bits.”

“How are you?”

He shrugs and then he says, “Fuck off, Katherine.”

“Why are you angry with me?”

“You and Joe are the same,” he says. “You make me feel like an idiot.”

“I’m not trying to make you feel that way.”

“Yeah, well. I’m sorry.”

“I know,” she says.

“The fuck you know.”

She cocks her head, notices the gesture and laughs at herself.

“You are free,” she says. “And you stay that way.” She takes a step closer to him. He backs up. “I’m staying at my dad’s,” she says. “In the caravan.”

“Like before.”

She nods.

“I saw you up by the school,” he says. “Seven thirty in the morning with a can in your lap, being sick between your knees.”

“You’re angry.”

“It’s your life,” he says. “Is Joe with you?”

She shakes her head. He looks at the ground then he summons something, his face changes and there is a bitter, hurtful expression there as he says, “Tell him I meant it. And you. You should leave me alone.”

5.

She walks clear of the long underground passage. Two children are playing in the groundwater between two escarpments. It is a burial ground, which is not problematic or symbolic or triumphant.

...

The train is delayed at a stop outside of London and it sits in the station for a while. She looks through a newspaper, writes some notes, then she falls asleep and when she wakes the train is moving very slowly through some of southern England, a long parade of fields and sheep and the milky light of the afternoon.

She copies the directions from her phone onto a scrap of paper but is lost fairly swiftly, then she finds a sign to the seafront and walks along the promenade until the big white hotel appears on her left. There is a doorman in top and tails. He holds the door for her. The girl on the desk is standing very properly, holding the back of her hand at her lap, staring ahead, the lobby empty, the high ceilings and high curved windows suspending the airy ease of the place. She checks in. She follows the doorman up two flights of stairs, walks past him as he holds open the door. She sits on the big bed. She strokes the duvet, lays back, looks at the swirling shapes on the ceiling. There is an en suite bathroom and she sits on the edge of the bath with the taps open, listening to the clapple of the water.

...

She looks out the window, a postcard. The pier is open and a ride at the end of it flings people out over the sea on a long rotating arm, their screams looping into the room, faded. She kneels by the bed. She puts her palms together in what feels like a childish pose, then she laces her fingers and touches her forehead to her clasped hands. She gathers her

thoughts together, edges them towards a patch of light across the boards and thinks of the empty galleries in the morning, the slanting trapezoid of light shifting across the plain boards. She rests in this space and says quietly, “God, help me to stay clean and sober this evening.”

She allows herself to feel protected and when she stands she imagines something has changed, and so it has. She imagines or remembers Joe lying on the kitchen floor, blood spread under him. She wonders for a moment if Kyle stood there looking at the knife in his hand and then she opens her bag, pauses, realises that she is looking for the knife she took from another boy – Dennis – and that this was so long ago that of course the knife won’t be there, it’s not even the same bag.

She gets changed, walks down to reception and then left into a bar area spotted with round tables with clean white cloths over them, unlit tealights in small glass bowls and a vase of white tulips on the bar. She orders a tonic with ice and lime and drinks it at the bar, thoughtless, a TV in the corner of the room showing the news. She goes back to the desk. No one comes. The girl is standing beyond the latticed window of the porch speaking Polish into her phone. Katherine swipes a square of memo pad from the desk and writes a quick note, excusing herself, then she walks along the water for a while. She squats against the sea wall and smokes a cigarette. A fat black guy walks towards her thumbing white buds in his ears. He stops and holds out a fist. She touches it.

“Close your eyes,” he says.

She does.

He wipes his thumb across her eyelids, one then the other. “Blessed,” he says.

...

She walks clear of the long underground passage. Two children are playing in the groundwater between two escarpments. Terezin. She watches them play - clouds scour the sky - there are artefacts in the museum. A ragged shoe, a doll, a spoon. Steel rings, shoulder-height, screwed to the wall.

Useful.

Things. Artefacts. Groundwater.

...

Some rotting picnic benches on a small elevated courtyard in front of the inn. It's gloomy inside. A porthole window in a swing-door shows a communal room where some tattooed kids are playing pool, bottles of Heineken on the table, rock 'n' roll music from the tatty speakers in the corner.

The guy on the desk nods hello and scratches the shrink-wrapped tattoo at the top of his arm.

"You have a room?"

"Just you?"

"Yes."

He sorts out a key. She pays.

There is a double bed dressed in white linen, a tea-station by the window, a desk. Again, an en suite, the shower's concertina door squashed open, a mildewed packing crate in the stall. The crossed window is jammed open with a side-on Bible. There's a fold-out chair. She turns the kettle on but can't find a cup so she folds out the chair and sits at the window and smokes a cigarette. The day moves. She is more comfortable here in a scruffy B&B room than a smart hotel and instead of interrogating that fact she says quietly to herself, "You have to be careful in places like this."

After a while she takes out her paperwork and reads through the extract. She paces the room, reading it aloud, listening to the heavy cushioning of the waves against the sea wall, the now-distant wheeling of the girls, other girls, being flung out over the sea.

She leaves the hotel and crosses the road barefoot. The stones are warm and round. A group of kids are sitting on a cheque blanket with bottles of fruit cider, reclining, leaning on their elbows. She stops some way past them, close to the water. Breakers fizz across the stones. She takes off her shirt and jeans and moves her arms by her sides, eyes closed. She steps out into the water, up to her knees and then her belly and then she falls forward into it and turns onto her back, rotating a view of the sky and the sea. She looks at the purplish wisps of cloud.

She swims for a while then comes back to the shore. Her clothes are gone. One of the boys whistles and holds up her shirt.

“They were blowing away,” he says.

“Thank you.”

“Cold?”

“Yes,” she says.

The girl palms her hair away from her eyes and holds out a bottle of cider.

“No,” says K. “Thank you.”

She puts on her shirt but her fingers are stiff, the buttons are tricky. The girl twists the bottle into the stones, steadying it, then she stands and brushes the sand from the back of her skirt. She stands in front of Katherine, takes her hand and leads it to her hip. She fastens the buttons, touches a line of water from Katherine’s chin.

“There,” she says, and she sits down again and one of the boys says, “So noble.”

K smiles. She pulls on her jeans.

“Bye,” she says. They raise hands and one of them starts playing a guitar as she walks away. She picks her way up to the wall and leans against it, sheltered. She closes her eyes and communes, in a way, full of the clean beauty of the evening. She thinks about the reading and a quick glimmer of anxiety runs through her, then dissipates, leaving behind a sense of longing that surprises her. She looks at the sea, the small rolling breakers. As the waves break and spread she marks the moment. She imagines winning the prize and feels herself bargaining with the world. And if she does not win then the moment will still be meaningful because she has just made it so. The novel as she sent it to these people is the way it should be. The fragments to which she is now devoted are the way it should be. Both are true.

...

She wanders through The Lanes then comes out by the bookshop. The doors are locked but the lights are up and after a while a woman comes to the doors and says through the glass, “You here for the reading?”

A spiral staircase leads to the third floor where there’s a space for chairs and a row of desks at the front. The other finalists are sitting in the front row, four women and a man. She removes a piece of paper saying *Reserved* from the last empty chair. The woman beside her puts out a hand. She has big teeth. “Debbie,” she says.

“Katherine.”

“Ah,” says Debbie. “*The Waste Book*.”

“Yes.”

There is a small crowd around an island of books, a trestle table with bottles of white wine and snacks. A woman in a very organised outfit ushers the crowd to their seats. Three women sit behind the desks. The middle woman introduces herself. She is an agent and she tells them about the prize, about the publisher sponsoring the prize and about an agent's role. It is interesting to hear about writing as a business, the things one needs to consider, and by the time the woman has finished speaking Katherine has been impressed and she looks at the pages in her hand. The woman has changed, for a moment, what she feels she is holding, has made these pages represent something else entirely.

She listens to the others read. There is the woman with the teeth, a much younger woman, younger than Katherine, with a bob and red DMs. She reads a story about a soldier with PTSD. There is another story – the man's – about a salesman travelling around Wisconsin. Each time a reader has finished, they clap.

Katherine steps up to read. Kyle is sitting in the back row with his legs crossed and a glass of wine. She nods to him. It is right that he's here. He's wearing a new white shirt with the creases in, his face glossy with sweat. He's smiling.

She reads from the beginning and remembers how all of this started, her travels as a young woman, and how those experiences folded into the notes she revisited when she came into treatment. She reads about Katherine sitting in the yard of a B&B room in Budapest. A white admiral makes stuttering U-shapes across the yard and the little English girl shoots out a hand and says, "A butterfly!"

It feels obvious to Katherine that there is nothing particularly interesting about this young woman but that we need to follow her in this way in order for something silent and almost visible to trail in her wake. What is not said is given form by what is, and the absence begins to make itself felt. She reads for longer than the others, for maybe ten minutes, and

when she finishes there is a smattering of applause and Kyle nods his head and stands and she watches him descend the spiral stairs.

...

She crosses the road and stops at a guy and a girl sitting on the concrete island by the bus shelter, a guitar between them. The boy stares at the big pigeons gimping around on the flagstones, his eyes glassy.

“Enormous pigeons,” says the girl.

“Yes,” says Katherine. “Like dogs.” She holds out the bottle of wine she has won.
“Do you want this?”

The girl takes it, expertly twists off the wire and eases the cork out with a dull thump. K. leaves them to it and wanders down The Lanes. There’s a bar halfway down with a yellow awning, some mis-matching chairs on the pavement. A girl at the bar fingers her phone and quietly sings to the music. The light is failing. The song changes, something on guitars, something sad.

She orders a pear soda, peels off the cap and sips. “Tastes like dirt,” says K.

“Yes,” says the girl.

Patio doors at the back lead out to a very small courtyard and there’s a black woman in a beanie sitting at the pentagon table at the back. Birdsong. The light is the same as heartache and the music, quieter out here, is the same as both. She has been here before, or somewhere like it. A powerful streak of déjà vu intensifies and then clarifies. She *has* been here before.

The woman looks up from her book. “Katherine,” she says.

They shake hands.

A couple come out, a woman touching her beret, saying to her friend, an old man in a striped shirt, “Feel all St. Trinian’s in me berry.”

Tanya closes her book and tucks it in the big red bag at her side. “You gave me your number,” she says.

“Yes,” says Katherine.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call.”

“That’s okay.”

They’re quiet for a while. The couple behind them are talking about the man’s operation, how she’ll take him to the hospital next day because it’s good to have someone there.

Tanya leans across the table and says, “I’ve had that. What he’s got.”

“What’s he got?” says K.

Tanya shrugs. “I’m one of those people,” she says. “Thinks I’ve got everything.”

The serving girl comes out, lights a cigarette and puts one hand under her arm. She raises a hand to K. who raises her bottle and smiles.

The music changes. They all listen to it for a bit then the girl sings along for a few bars and when she stops all four of them clap. The girl does a neat little curtsey, scratches her cigarette against the wall and goes back in. A plane goes overhead and both of these women – Tanya, Katherine – watch it drawing across the taut, darkening sky.

Tanya touches her hair. “Need a haircut,” she says.

“I like getting a haircut,” says Katherine.

“Me too.”

“I like it when people touch my hair.”

“You like salsa?” says Tanya.

“Salsa?”

“Where we met.”

“No.”

“I didn’t think so,” says Tanya.

“Why?”

“You can’t dance. No offense.”

“It’s okay,” says K. “I can’t dance.”

“You live here?” says Tanya.

“I live in London. But I did live here. Near here. I went away for a while.”

“Why?”

“I wasn’t well. I stayed near here, Uckfield, in a cottage. That’s when I saw you. I had a load of money.”

“Yeah? What’d you do with it?”

“I buried it,” says K. “In a field.”

“Why’d you give me your number?”

“I don’t know,” says K. “I saw you dancing. You looked awkward but then you limbered up. You looked like you were enjoying yourself. It was nice to watch, so...”

“I was a bit drunk,” says Tanya. “You have many friends?”

Katherine laughs. “I don’t know,” she says.

“What’d you do with that money?”

“There wasn’t any money.”

She lights a cigarette. She looks at the sky. The day’s warmth has gone but the air is still loose with it, like mineral water. She thinks about the reading and flushes. It’s a nice memory already, something that happened. The piece was blind, that’s how she feels about it. As certain films are blind. They cannot read themselves and this is a very good thing, and they proceed as though not even aware that this reading is expected of them. She remembers her neighbour’s milky eyes.

“My neighbour’s blind,” she says. “She gave me a cat.”

“I have a blind friend,” says Tanya.

Katherine nods. Tanya says, “Sometimes I wish everyone was blind.”

“So no one would see you,” says K.

“Yes,” says Tanya. She finishes her wine.

“You don’t drink?”

“No.”

“That’s good.”

Pause.

“My husband,” she holds up a hand and turns the ring with her finger. “He’s in the rooms. AA, you know?”

“Yes.”

“Are you?”

“Yes.”

“I worry about him. He’s from London, like you. East London. Said he came down here looking for someone, then he met me and stayed. We got married, so...”

“What’s his name?”

“Asra.”

Katherine finishes her soda. The bar girl comes out with a black tray, some tea-lights on it. Berry and her friend clap their hands, Tanya checks her phone then she follows the girl inside and Katherine is happy sitting here and then she changes her mind and without thinking about it too much she goes through to the bar and touches Tanya on the shoulder.

“I’m going,” she says.

“Okay. Nice to meet you again.”

“Nice to meet you,” says K.

6.

Infer a relationship between Katherine &c.

She kneels before an arch carved into a protruding rock-face, its back wall a chalky yellow wash, a scene painted over it, faint, faded. A winged cherub gazing upwards, Our Lady hovering over him, robed and serene, making the sign of *okay* (or *worthless*) with her fingers. A crunchy yellow rose on the stone shelf, an empty tea-light, its wick a blackened nub. She flicks her lighter and the damp wick sputters, a flame pears to life, flares, dies.

...

“I’m awake,” she says.

He stands in the bedroom doorway, a carrier bag of beers wound around one hand. He looks at her bandaged arms. “What happened?” he says.

She nods behind him. “Go through.”

He sits on the couch with the beers between his feet. She stands in front of him, puts her t-shirt on but gets the arms round the wrong way. She takes it off, sits beside him and holds her hands.

“So,” he says.

“Yes,” she says.

She doesn’t know what time it is and the dream is nearby, whatever it was. The near-dark of the van is very similar to the fact that he is here. He holds a beer out for her and she draws a slow arc with one hand: *No*.

“I’ve missed you,” she says.

“Have you?”

“I feel like I have. Now that you’re here. Do you want a light on?”

“I don’t mind.”

“You were stabbed.”

“Yes. You’re not drinking?”

“Not right now.”

“Are you okay?”

She stretches her legs out and wiggles her toes. “I saw Kyle,” she says. “He’s angry with us.”

“I know. He thinks I’m going to get back at him.”

“Are you?”

“He’d rather I did.”

“It unsettles people,” she says.

“What does?”

“Not behaving as they expect you to.”

They are quiet for a while. It is very evocative and very still and though they don’t need to say anything, to introduce anything from outside into this, into the near-dark of the van and their nearness, she asks where he was stabbed and he lifts up his shirt. It is true, he was stabbed in the side, under the ribs, and so they have bandaged him up and here he is, sitting beside her with his shirt raised and a beer in his hand.

“How did you know I was back?”

“I called your dad. He said you were down here.”

“You’ve been working with him?”

“Yes,” he says. “Now and again.”

The couches form an L and she lies down along one arm of it and he lies down along the other, their heads almost touching.

“I was going to follow you to London,” he says.

“Why didn’t you? Or go somewhere else?”

Pause.

“Are you trying to hurt me?” she says. “Is that why you stay here, get into fights.”

“Is that what you think?”

“I don’t know,” she says. “Do you wonder what would have happened? If I’d kept the baby. If you and I were parents.”

“No.”

“I imagine us dropping our stuff and gathering some sticks together, building a den.”

“Like this,” he says. “The caravan... We could go away together.”

“To Russia.”

“Sure,” he says. “To Russia.”

“I came here to hide,” she says. “Before I left for London. I was seeing the drug and alcohol people, doing these groups, one-to-ones. I kept a drink diary.”

“How come it didn’t work?”

“What do you mean?”

“Wasn’t the point to stay sober?”

“I don’t know what the point was. I just wanted some time off. I came out of the detox and stood on the platform at Poplar DLR. The sky was so blue I thought I was going to die, I just couldn’t contain it. Then it was like a jump-cut and I was sitting in the park at seven-thirty in the morning, in the snow, with four cans of K cider at my hip, thinking, *How have I..?*”

Did it happen like that?

“So you left,” he says. “Like before.”

“Before?”

“When we finished college. We were friends and then you just... disappeared.”

“I was writing,” she says.

“Writing what?”

She shrugs.

“You ever finish it?”

“Why’ve you been working with my dad?”

“Because of you.”

“To feel close to me.”

“Yes.”

She gets up and turns on the light. The intimacy wavers.

“It’s hard,” he says. “Being in love with you.”

She shakes her head.

“You know Kyle’s old man sells weed?”

“Yes,” she says.

“He got thirty grand for the last crop. He’s getting ready to sell again.”

“You’re going to steal it from him.”

“Yes.”

“To get back at Kyle.”

“Maybe,” he says.

...

They’re in bed. Her arms are crossed over her chest. They are each looking at the ceiling. Wind whistles around the van, rocking it.

“We were here one Sunday, sitting in the front room. Your dad was making lunch and you were sitting in the armchair with a paper. We got drunk the night before and you’d scribbled something on your arm with an eyeliner pen and you were all scruffy and unwashed. I was sitting on the floor watching you and you started singing really quietly. It was so simple and clear, that feeling. I didn’t want or expect anything.”

She listens to him breathing and it is strange to think that he is listening to her breathing, that he is himself and she is herself, and that their separation from one another is responsible for a pain. She would like to be kind, to be honest, to tell him something true. It's a misunderstanding, that's all.

She leaves him sleeping and goes out to the garden. The night is subtle and precise, balanced by the stars. Clouds like paint wash past a slither of white moon. She steps over the grass, draws on her cigarette and exhales skyward with a neat shiver. She touches the line on her wrist without judgement. She walks to the patio doors and puts her hand against the smooth glass.

She spins, an alarm goes off, shrill and clear. She walks down beside the house to the pavement out front. The security light on the neighbour's house alarm blinks red as the siren yelps steadily. The road is deserted. A shooting star arcs over the roofs, a bright streak of electric blue which burns out to nothing almost instantly, making her heartbeat skip. Her arms are alive with goosebumps. She feels as though there must be something here and it is as though the yearning itself is intimately bound to the meaning it gropes towards. She could drop to her knees. The yearning is all there is, is proof of nothing more than the need to search. She is chasing her own tail. The alarm loops off and there is nothing out here but silence. The sky is black and empty. She feels as though she has been tipped out of herself.

...

She wakes early and makes a cup of tea. She stands in the garden. Laundry moves on the rotary line. She sips her tea. She is sober. The day aches, gesturing with a quiet, nimble grace. She feels as though she ought to do something with it, to move her hands around it, to write and contain its gentle precision. Instead she sits here, she lets it pass. As time draws away from her the waste is so bountiful her heart breaks.

...

She uncoils the yellow hose and turns on the tap. She carries the spray in front of herself, a rainbow fanned across it. She flashes water at the narrow flowerbed, darkening the panelled fence, dousing the bright nasturtiums. The patio doors are open. Her father sits at the kitchen table with a newspaper and a plate of sardines on toast and Joe strims the weeds around the caravan. Flecks of green stick to his forearms. The trimmer string blinks tinnily against the Calor-gas bottle. A Spain-shaped cloud moves across the sun. Katherine rushes dust from the uneven patio then drops the hose and squeezes the tap closed. Joe swings the trimmer round, releases the trigger and the noise dies. He wipes one eye. A robin lands with a light fluttering bump on the fence.

...

She sits on her father's bed. The huddled grey remains of a while-ago coal fire in the bedroom's grate, a short wall of house bricks in front of it. Before bed her father would wrap one of the bricks in a tea-towel and put it under her quilt.

A painting, one of her father's, in a frame above the fireplace. The head of Anubis above an orange pyramid, a desert in yellow and orange oils. When she was tiny he used to paint in the night. Sometimes she'd wake up and he'd make her hot milk and they'd sit in the kitchen, whispering.

She remembers that happening once.

She lifts the phone from its cradle and dials the number by heart.

"Drug and alcohol services, Deborah speaking."

"Deborah, it's Katherine Goss."

7.

She takes the small TV off the dining chair. Sit down, she says. He does. He opens his hand, showing her the paring knife he's brought. You have money, he says. English. His spare hand circles the crown of his shaved head. A young man, knees wide, Katherine standing before him, head cocked, quiet, hands on her kidneys. The way they are held, delimited, by the room, by the frame, by the quiet.

...

She pauses under a streetlamp, feeling the glow upon her. He is holding a bag. He says, "Funny to see you without a drink in your hand."

"Shall we go in," she says.

The kid is standing at the desk. Kyle lets her go ahead, nervous, she imagines, in situations like this. She wonders, with an unkind smile, how uncomfortable he felt in the bookshop.

"I left my key," she says.

The kid nods and scratches the top of his arm.

"What's the tattoo?" she says.

"Tribal," he says.

"Okay."

He gives her the key.

"A double," says the boy, looking to Kyle. She turns to him too. Sweetly, he swallows.

“Yes,” says Katherine. “A double.”

She passes him the key, gesturing to the narrow stairwell with the back of her wrist. She lets him lead. The flat-bottomed lightshades are peppered with dead flies. She thinks of the hotel room in Prague, the wide landing with a pedestal propping the door open, doubling as an ashtray. She is holding her cigarettes and yet the landing is completely different, is this landing, narrow and long. He checks the number on the key, finds the door and opens it for her. She waits again for him to go first. He puts his bag on the bed and goes to the window. He shifts it up. It slides down again. She takes the bible from the tea-station and hands it him.

“To prop the window,” she says.

He nods and does as he’s been told. She sits under the window, her little fold-out chair, facing into the room, legs crossed, waiting.

“What was prison like,” she says.

“What’d you think?”

“Horrible, I reckon.”

“Not that you’d know.”

“No.”

“Should have gone to jail. What you did to my old man.”

“But I didn’t.”

He is standing in front of her, unsure of himself. He looks left, into the bathroom, his reflection glowering in the dimness.

“Did you like the reading?”

He snorts derisively then relaxes his shoulders and he seems far more at ease when he says, simply, “Yes. I liked what you read.”

“You’re here to tell me about Joe?”

“You were in love with him.”

“We were friends a long time.”

He snorts again. She wishes she hadn’t said it. He sits on the edge of the bed and puts his hand on his bag. It’s amusing. That he has managed, somehow, to stay bound to a motive, clear enough to him, for long enough that he could get the trains all the way to Brighton. Maybe he sat on the stones this afternoon, took his socks off, let the breakers fizz across his toes. Maybe he thought, *This is ridiculous*. And then he gathered it all together again. He rehearsed the mechanics. *She did this, and so I will do that. Something will be balanced. I will feel better.*

She would like very much to release him from that, but all she can think to say is, “You should forgive me, Kyle. It will be easier for you.”

“You always look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“You remember when I stabbed him? Before you went to my dad’s. You think I did that to get back at you. I didn’t. I just did it. We were fucking around in the kitchen, been on the pipes all night. Paul was there, the retarded kid. I don’t even know what we were doing. Then I was holding the knife and I thought, *I’m going to put it in him*. And I did. And I was holding the knife and it was in him.”

She waits.

“And then,” he says. “Later.”

She shakes her head. “No,” she says. It hurts.

“And you lied for me.”

He unzips his bag and withdraws the knife. He holds it between his knees.

“Why don’t you tell me why you are here,” she says.

“I was at your dad’s the night he died. He had a letter, from Joe. This was just after the trial, after your story got me off, you stood there and lied and I was convinced they’d take you apart, that I was going away for a long time. Part of me wanted it. Then your dad called me. He couldn’t understand why Joe had sent him this letter, telling him what you did to my old man, left him bleeding to death in the hallway. He said all sorts of awful things. That you killed his baby.”

He holds her eyes. There is the sound of the sea, when she concentrates on it. She brings her concentration back here, to this room. She imagines her father dying, holding his chest, the painful, hard full stop, the sick feeling in his heart that is the thought of his daughter doing those things.

“Now you’ve told me,” she says.

“I stayed with him. I called the ambulance. That’s the truth. Your mother said it was me, that I said something that made him...”

There is a long silence and then, abruptly, surprising herself, she stands. He raises the knife.

“Sit down.”

“You want to be punished.”

“Sit down, I said.”

“I’m getting some water.”

A hotel room, then. Another. And there he is, a child of God.

She thinks, *You are not embarrassed about the fact that we are ridiculous, are you?*

She steps towards him. He stands. She walks into the blade until it presses against her belly. She puts her hands on his shoulders. He bites his teeth and his eyes well up. His jaw set with anger, his arms trembling. She backs up. She walks into the bathroom and he follows her in and elbows the door closed. Her back is against the sink. It’s dark.

“Open the door.”

Beat.

“No.”

...

He is losing his nerve. She sits on the end of the bed, ankles crossed. She looks at her left hand. We look at her left hand. She stands abruptly – he raises the knife – I’m getting some water, she says.

...

She skips down to reception bleeding from the nose. She pushes the back of her wrist against her top lip and notices the knife in her hand. She steps outside. The kids from the beach are sitting at the picnic benches. She drops her hand to her side, nods to the kids and walks to the front porch. There is a potted palm on the steps. She pushes the blade into the

dirt and squashes the handle down with her thumb, burying it. She spits bloody and crosses the road.

She walks briskly. The seafront winds upwards away from the town, a curving line of lit buildings, the empty beach on her right sloping towards a receding sea. She stops and looks at her hands. She sucks off some of the blood, her breath metallic and harsh. She leans over and puts her hands on her thighs. She watches blood patter to the pavement. She wonders if she needs to cough so she coughs and the blood spatters. It is mesmerising. She bends her knees and lowers herself and then her knees are on the pavement. She touches her blood, one of the drops, and presses her wet fingertip to her face, smudging the blood against herself. She knows this isn't how it works but the rule seems strange. A glass of water, for instance, with the water outside of the glass. The body. She shifts round and leans against the wall, a van parked at the kerb in front of her. She looks at the wheel-arch. It is good to say *wheel-arch* when that is what you mean. She says it. She can hear the sea behind her. She listens. Everything else goes away.

After a period of blankness she says, "Get up then."

She does. It's easy enough. She's bleeding. She walks. If all the blood goes, you die, though if the wounds are closed then the body makes more, to replace what was lost. She marvels at that and it seems that this thought and all it is attached to leads her and is related to the gentle curve and climb of the road, the hotels and pubs segueing into plain and mostly dark terraced houses, tall and uniform, the road clean and black, a patch of grass widening on her right, carefully separating her from the sea. She walks until she is out of breath. She takes out her phone and flicks through the numbers then pauses and looks at the black sky.

She phones 999 and asks for an ambulance. "Someone's been hurt," she says. She gives the name of the hotel and listens to the woman asking her questions. She answers them.

She hangs up and walks on until she finds a pub on the corner, a kid outside with his sleeves rolled to the elbow standing the picnic benches against the wall. She gives him a nod. She goes inside.

A few old boys at the bar, some students by the juke box. She goes straight through to the loos. They're clean and smart. Like the toilets in the upstairs of a meeting in the church behind Goldsmiths. Saturday night, Big Book. The toilets at the bus station in Colchester. A half bottle of vodka, the swift crack of the cap. Greenwich, the barred windows, a tri-colour smudge of toothpaste on the rim of the sink. Others. Meetings. This is what she does. She goes to meetings and she looks at art and she doesn't want to drink.

She flushes. She cleans herself up enough to order a brandy at the bar.

"Lights up," says the woman. "Last orders."

Katherine takes her drink to the corner and sits down. There is a warm brandy between her hands. She turns the glass. She looks at the crossed window, a glossy blackness, then she sets the glass in the middle of the table and leaves.

8.

Emotional responses shaped by or at least interacting with
the things that happen. And this correlative trajectory
describes the story of us. The *actress*
regards her.
Show me the gaps [says the filmmaker].

...

Clive tells no one in particular that he once gave himself a facelift with a bottle of Sarsons vinegar. He slaps a pink cheek. "Got third-degree burns," he says.

The guy beside her shifts painfully, his swollen legs out straight, his feet bandaged. One of the women keeps checking her handbag, reassured for a few seconds by the clink of the bottles inside. Another smudges her streaming eyes with the heel of her palm and says, "God, sorry, I don't know what's the matter with me today."

The room is windowless, small and stuffy, the walls grey. Jane comes in, touches Katherine on the knee mouths hi and scrolls to a clear page on the flipchart. Clive's elbow slips off his knee and he palms his forehead.

"Alt, sorry."

"Okay?" says Jane.

A phone chirrups.

They go around the room and introduce themselves. When they get to Katherine the door is flung open and Rowena trips over her bootlaces and drawls a nasal, "Sorry, guys."

She sits in the spare chair, sees Katherine across from her and says, "Kat! Hey!"

"You two know each other," says Jane.

Katherine nods. "Hello."

"How are ya, Kat? You look good."

"Thank you."

Rowena looks like she's just been dug up. New Rocks, fucked jeans, *Flux of Pink Indians* across her vest. Purple bruises pick out the lines where her veins used to show.

Jane talks about cravings. She tells them they pass. Katherine finds it hard to believe her.

...

To know someone: To be able to predict, with a fair degree of confidence, how that person will react in a given situation.

No, we might say, that doesn't sound like her. Or:

Yes, that sounds like Katherine.

...

A long window looks out over the courtyard. Sundown. Katherine didn't pay attention to how they got here. She leans against the washing machine and the squaddie, Kevin, fills the pipe for her and she inhales and holds it and then exhales and her blurred vision becomes very clear and the room is suffused with aching sunlight. She thumbs purged tears from her cheeks, moved.

She leaves Kevin and Row in the kitchen area and she sits on the couch next to Paul. Paul pats her on the knee. He smiles. She watches his mouth as he speaks. A pellet of grey-purple spittle gathers at the corner of his mouth. Music plays from a laptop on the arm of the couch. A collection of beers, bottles, safely by her feet. She passes one to Paul. "Here," she says.

He pops the cap with a lighter and passes it back and she drinks it quickly and she enjoys it very much. She agrees with Paul. She nods her head. It doesn't matter at all that she can't really understand what he's saying, she gets it anyway, whatever it is. He puts his hand on her knee and she's nodding and he slides his hand up her thigh. Kevin brings the pipe over and gives it to his friend. She watches Paul smoke a pipe and then set one up for her and she smokes and exhales. It's important that she stands and she does and she walks behind the couch. She puts her hands on Paul's shoulders. He looks up at her. He smiles dopily like a dog. He is very trusting and stupid, just like a dog, just like her. The late sun beatifies the windows. She talks about how strange it is that she has a body. She moves her arms. There are black spots around Paul's eyes, moles, birthmarks. The razor-marks across his shiny shaved head seem beautiful, cartographic, lit up by the rich sunlight. The shape of the window seems full with meaning. She strokes the holy fool's naked rubbery scalp. She says the word, "Platinum."

Rowena brings her a square of foil and a foil cigarette and Katherine takes it from her, solemnly tipping her head in thanks. She hovers a flame under the tiny ball of heroin and as it melts it runs along the foil as a line of smoking black caramel. Someone is saying quietly but insistently, "Follow the smoke, not the heroin," but Katherine's eyesight staggers and she holds the smoke in and exhales with a delicious emptying shiver that makes her want to sit down, which she does.

...

She is walking around the straight narrow trunk of a plane tree, her palm skimming the smooth dry bark. She pauses and ejects a gout of clear vomit across the grass. It's getting dark. She seems to be saying over and over, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

She stares at the moon and waits for the sweats and the sickness to subside. The sky is far too clear and empty and she is empty too and the weird symbiosis is so unsettling she has to turn away.

She stops on the first floor landing and presses her forehead against the window. She looks out to the small playground. The swings creak, communing with the unhurried whispering of the trees. She can see herself in wet splashes on the grass. She wishes she hadn't been sick. She fingers a spent scratch-card on the window-ledge but it doesn't mean anything. The chilling fingertip of a come-down presses against her spine. Her breath fans out against the glass and she squeaks a finger through her own greyness.

Come back to yourself, Katherine.

She walks along the row of front doors. Tinny music comes from Rowena's, the guys' voices, fucked, lazy. She doesn't want to go in there. There's a drum-roll of footsteps from the flat next door followed by a woman's shrill panicked scream. Katherine hurries inside, stands in the hallway and tries to gather herself. A muffled thud hits the wall from the neighbour's side, disturbing a pink birthday card on the ledge. She stares at it.

Row is standing by the sink shaking her head. She is talking about Bug, her daughter.

"I want her back," she is saying as she rocks forward and back, crying.

The squaddie is standing in front of her with his hands in her pockets. He bends slightly so that his eyes meet hers and he says, "Come on, Row. Where's that other bit?"

Row lifts her hand from the sink. The squaddie grabs her wrist and says, "Drop it," and a bread-knife clatters onto the draining board. Rowena leans her forehead against his chest and he takes his hand from her pocket and kisses her on the top of the head.

The retarded guy jolts in his sleep, knocking the laptop from the arm of the couch. It claps closed and the music goes off. There's a thud from next door and then a man shouts, "I'll cut your fuckin' head off, you crack-head Paki cunt!"

"Jesus," says Rowena. "He'll kill her, I swear to God."

Katherine is saying something to herself, her lips are moving. As soon as she realises this and tries to find out what she is saying her lips stop moving. She walks over to the couch. Paul looks up at her. She touches her breast and walks back to the hallway. The woman, the neighbour, is crying, sobbing, and then she screams again and a dull impact makes the wall shiver. A glass bursts.

She finds the bathroom and sits on the edge of the bath with a shaving mirror on one knee. She takes a wrap of cocaine from her bra and tries to stop her knee from bouncing. It's fiddly and the coke is lumpy. She bumps a little with the corner of her bankcard, eats some, stands things up, the mirror, a bottle of shampoo, tidying, moving stuff around.

The squaddie has found Row's other baggie and is tipping some of it out on the side. Row slides down the cupboards holding her arm. Katherine takes the bottle from the draining board and drinks from it. The vodka is warm and poisonous. She puts the bottle back. She kneels down next to Rowena. "I'm sorry for what I said, Row. That you'd been dug up."

She goes outside and stands in front of the neighbour's door. The door is black. She knocks on the door and then panic shivers through her and she hammers on the door and then throws her shoulder at it. It hurts. She does it again and the door swallows her weight, flexes and then bursts open, the door jamb splintering. She takes a step back. There is a man standing immediately in front of her with a hand at his throat. Dark blood runs through his

fingers. His eyes are wide and very blue and he looks a lot younger than he sounded. His t-shirt's back-to-front.

Katherine pushes past him and he turns to her and touches her shoulder and she pushes him against the wall and follows the hallway round to the kitchen. It smells of warm laundry. The dryer turns. She stands on the threshold. The round kitchen table is on its side. A wooden fruit bowl broken in two by her feet. Fragments of glass across the black and white beehive floor-tiles, a pile of dirt and collapsed terracotta in front of the washing machine. There's blood scattered around and a puddle of it under the sink with a slippery footstep through the middle. The blinds are closed.

The young woman is huddled in the corner in a faded purple dressing gown, sobbing quietly, the palm of one hand pressing against her eye. Katherine looks at the smudged bloody handprint on the kettle as she crouches beside the woman and the woman takes her hand from her face and looks at Katherine. Her eyes are swollen. She sobs. A bubble of blood inflates under one nostril then bursts with a quiet *plink*.

The woman says, "Baby!" and she stands up and moves quickly from the room, deftly overstepping the glass.

Katherine remembers that she has a phone and she takes it from her pocket and stares at it for a moment and then she puts it away. There's a serrated bread-knife in the sink, thin crescents of blood on the teeth. She picks up the knife and steps over the blood and the broken glass.

The woman is sitting at the top of the stairs with her arms around a limp child who leans against her, letting himself be rocked. The husband or boyfriend is on all fours over the threshold of the front door. He's moaning, his forehead pressed against the ground as though

in prayer. The other three are standing around him, fumbling with their phones, arguing. Katherine pushes them out of the way, gesturing aimlessly with the knife.

She finds her satchel beside the couch and puts the knife and three bottles of beer in her bag but she leaves the vodka and the drugs and she touches her breast on her way out.

The squaddie bounces on his heels with a hand on the sick man's back. The man sputters. His shoulders heave. His bare feet writhe on the spot, making the door-mat shuffle.

Kevin says, "Get rid of the drugs, Row. Row!"

Rowena calls after her, "Kat!" she says. "Katherine!"

How many children, thinks Katherine, at the top of the stairs.

...

There, says Ivana. Legs splayed, head cocked. A flat counterpane, a crossed window. She is right: There's almost a body.

...

She walks for a long time. She tries to follow a path through the undergrowth but it keeps disappearing. Eventually she comes out at the bottom of the park and she stands on the bridge for a while. Her thoughts drown in the fast running water of the weir.

On the High Street she stops in front of the Spar, checks herself for blood and goes inside.

...

A digger sits obliquely on a pile of rubble. Signs on the fence say the bus station has moved. She stands at the corner where her stop used to be. There are bushes and tramped dirt

and then a fractured Roman wall overlooking Priory Street car park. She stands in the gap between the bushes and the wall. She reminds herself to remember herself but her thoughts wander and thin and disappear. She looks at the moon but the moon. The moon is looking the other way. Images slowly revolve and reappear like a cold bloody handprint across her face. The man with the heel of his palm at his throat, the way he touched her shoulder as she passed. She puts her hand in the bag. The knife is still there. The bus station has been closed for months. She knew that.

She walks to Scheregate Steps and then down to the lopsided hotel on the corner. There's a very old woman on the tiny reception desk. The lobby is small and red, the ceiling and wall beams exposed and wonky. She asks for a room.

"It's late," says the woman.

She takes Katherine up a narrow staircase to a single room with a sloping ceiling, a sink, a small corner window overlooking a black square courtyard.

She decides to count her money and then changes her mind. She drinks some brandy and sorts some of the coke into four biggish lines on the seat of the desk chair. She does two lines and paces the room, pacing through her thoughts, feeling as though she is putting them into some sort of order only to turn on her heels and realise that it's all senseless. She turns on the television and finds a music channel and she sits on the edge of the bed. She nods along to the music videos, does another line, dances. She tells herself the coke is better than it is, that she's feeling better, but there's something beneath the feeling, something she can't quite excavate, this final, tight morsel of herself that just won't be exposed. She wants to dig it out, to discard it, so she drinks, drinks and drinks, trying to drink through the brandy, as though that will help her penetrate to the last morsel of Katherine Goss, but there it always is, this

crouched remainder, the irreconcilable remainder that just will not budge, no matter how aggressively she tries, no matter how bright and inspired her rearrangement of the formula.

Remainder, Katherine.

...

She phones Joe at some point, very early in the morning. She is saying to herself, *Are you pretending, Katherine? Are you really this fucked? This confused?*

She stares at the window. It got light. She abruptly leaves the room and the hotel and walks to the park in the thin early sunshine. Her hip aches. She sits in the enclosed Imola Garden and does the last of the cocaine.

She buys a breakfast roll from Subway, goes back to the room, stands around for a while trying to work out why she needed to be back here then she puts the roll on the windowsill and leaves.

She drinks a bottle of fruit cider in the Wetherspoons and sleeps on the bus home.

9.

She tries all three buzzers. No one answers. She shoulders the front door. It's not quite flush and it pings open, a yellow business card fluttering to the floor. The hallway is black. She slaps the wall, looking for a switch, remembering Bob's house, the discrepancy in a witness statement. Bob testified that the light was off when he left. The first officer on the scene found it on. One of them was mistaken and this mistake produced a gap. Someone must have entered this gap, entered the house, unseen, after Bob left and before the police arrived, a scene between scenes that was never recorded. This, said her barrister, would have been her alibi.

She sits on the stairs. It's very quiet. She knocks on the downstairs door, goes up, follows the corridor, an identical layout to her own building, though this is somewhere else entirely. The door that would be hers is the same colour, an empty screw-hole in the middle, the number nine in faded paint. She kicks the mat aside, takes the key and lets herself in.

A futon, scatter cushions, a round table under the window. A door is open in the corner, the bathroom full of steam, the mirror misted, a bath full of violet water. She sits on the edge of the bath. Her vision milks out, she swoons, slips off the bath and hits the stem of the sink with the back of her hand, pinging herself awake again. She makes herself stand, hands a space through the mist, takes off her clothes and gets in the bath. It is very good to lay here. She's tired. She wonders if there is something wrong with her but her body is very convincing, it just needs to rest so she rests.

When she wakes the water is tepid. It takes a long time to convince herself to stand. She feels very weak, her eyesight is thin and unsteady. She carefully steps free from the bath, stands trembling on the mat and finds herself in the mirror. Her face has thickened, her eyes

are swollen. She wipes herself down with a hand towel. She folds it neatly and leaves it on the toilet seat. She pulls on her jeans.

She looks through the chest of drawers, puts on one of Tanya's t-shirts and sits at the kitchen table. There's a grandfather clock in the corner of the room, it's hands at 12 'o clock, exactly. There's a pause, a second or so, then it gongs dully, the windows are splashed with light, a car, the engine cuts off, a door slams and someone coughs, a woman. She looks around for some paper, finds a post-it pad fixed to the fridge door with a magnet. She removes a page, takes a pen from the top of the microwave and writes a short note, her hands shaking. She looks around for somewhere to put it then she steps on the pedal of the bin, moves an egg-box aside and tucks the note beneath it. The door opens. Tanya drops a canvas shopping bag, gives a little yelp, touches her chest, says, "Katherine, fuck. What are you doing here?"

"You told me where you live."

"Yes."

Katherine nods. She steps over to the table but can feel her vision greying. Her knees melt. She is on the floor and Tanya is kneeling beside her. There are shapes on the ceiling. She tries to remember the time showing on the clock in the meds room.

...

She blinks back her surroundings full of blood and orange. Tanya is asleep in the chair beside her. There are pale yellow daffodils on the bedside table.

"Tanya."

"Katherine. Hello."

A nurse stops by the bed and touches Katherine's foot.

"Welcome to the land of the living."

It's a funny expression. Everyone is smiling.

"We have to run some tests," says the nurse. "You've been through the wars." She touches Katherine's chin and Katherine imagines that the bruises on her face are very evident and this must be what she means.

"Still," says the nurse, "it's not normal to faint like that. You were unconscious a long time, Katherine. You were in an ambulance. Do you remember that?"

She remembers being in an ambulance. She remembers ambulances and what they mean.

"What happened here?" says the nurse.

...

She leans on Tanya as they make their way outside. A small courtyard, mauve pebbles on the ground. The day is blue and precise. They share a cigarette.

Katherine tells her about Prague, about the body splayed against the wall, a death, a murder, that preceded her stay, the hotel room overlooking a bypass, a wood after the road, a cupola poking clear above the trees.

"Underlit," says K. "A green light. I'd sit on the terrace and look at the light by the Kafka museum and then, having looked at it, I visited the Kafka museum."

"I've never been to Prague," says Tanya. "Never been anywhere really."

They're quiet. A man steps out in pyjamas and slippers. He coughs thickly, takes cigarettes from the pocket of his dressing gown and raises a hand.

"Why are you going to Russia?" says Tanya.

Katherine shrugs. Because Kyle followed her, she could say. Because the sequences set there are thin and bloodless.

"The filmmaker dies in St. Petersburg," she says.

"What filmmaker?"

"The one I'm writing about. The one who is writing about me."

"There's something I should tell you," says Tanya.

Pause.

"Asra's gone. He's gone to London to find your friend and when I told him I knew you..." She breathes in, her breath catches. She sighs. She looks at her hands and Katherine looks there too, in time to see a tear land on her thumb.

"It's okay," says Katherine.

"No," says Tanya.

...

She wanders the corridors then sits in a small lounge and looks at the television for a while. She dozes and dreams of him, of one of them, of herself lying in a bath while the blood leaks from her. The filmmaker gets out, wipes the lens, opens the window and sits on the edge of the bath. She smokes a cigarette and waits for the steam to clear, then she presses record, gets back in the bath, fingers the razorblade from the edge and thumbs the invisible

blade. She gets out, checks the lens, presses stop and stands there a moment, abstracted from the reality within which she was composing herself.

They have put Kyle at the end of the ward. The nurses move around her without speaking. She takes the key from her wallet and strokes it with her thumb.

“What’s that?” he says.

“It’s for the house.”

“What am I supposed to do with it?”

“You can have it if you want.”

“Have it?”

“Live there, I mean.”

“With you?”

“No,” she says. “Maybe my mother will stay there.”

“What if I press charges against you?”

“It doesn’t matter,” she says.

“It will matter. You never been behind the door. No idea what that’s like.”

Pause.

“No.”

She touches his hand. He flinches then holds her fingers, his eyes welling up. He tightens his grip then pulls his hand away.

She gets changed in the toilets and heads back to her ward. The sister scoots her chair back, arms by her sides.

“And where do you think you are going?”

“I have to leave,” says Katherine.

“Why?”

“Because I have to be at work soon. And then I’m going away.”

“But you are injured.”

Katherine smiles. She negotiates her release, which is a phrase she enjoys saying to herself as she cajoles the nurse into fetching her discharge papers and allowing her to sign them. She walks back to town with a hand at her side. Her hip starts to ache. Her aching hip is an old injury, and that it’s back links her to a before which seams into the present and glides by with the traffic. She feels pleasantly confused. She stops at the church. Some people stand out front with polystyrene cups, smoking cigarettes, chatting, the AA sign on the fire exit door clattering on its string as people come in and out.

There’s a little trestle table in the entrance and a trolley for mismatching cups, a tin of biscuits.

“Michael.”

“Katherine.”

He pours her tea from the pot. It’s strong and hot. She doesn’t add milk. She nods – *Hello, hello* – and takes her tea back up the path. The day is very clear and bright, the sun a perfect yellow orb. She gently fingers her face.

Injuries, she thinks. You are variously injured.

She falls asleep in the meeting, wakes up and looks at the clock. She thinks it's stopped and then the hand moves, though the pause seemed far longer than a second. Nonetheless, it regulates, ticking evenly, as though she startled it into itself. She shares. She feels lighter for it. She describes a time from her drinking days and then she gestures towards her face, her voice impaired by her swollen jaw.

10.

She can't sleep and NEEDAS need bloods anyway so she takes herself down to the new hospital to get them done and has her staples out while she's there. The nurse is called Amy. She and Katherine were at school together.

She goes for a long walk into the country, across stubble fields, crossing stiles and dry ditches, trying to walk something off. She frequently pauses with a hand on her hip and she grits her teeth and keeps going until the dry grinding ache numbs her thoughts.

She stops in a turned field and throws dry clods of dirt at a line of crows. She heads back. There's a frayed hole in the all-over cloud and dim golden light emanates from it. An arrowhead of ducks goes overhead. It starts raining. On either side of the road narrow plaits of water stream through the runnels.

She stops out front the off-licence by the church. She opens the heavy gate into the churchyard. There's a lidless dustbin full of milk-cartons next to a tap in the wall. She washes her hands, puts water on her face and wanders among the graves for a bit then she buys a dozen cans of Holsten Pils and a bottle of air freshener. The woman bags up the beers, holds up the spray and says, "What's that, for the clean up?" and she smiles and Katherine smiles.

She cuts back down the alleyway alongside the High School. The playing field is empty. It's the summer holidays. Dandelion and willow fluff glides across the alleyway and halfway down there is a wooden bench overlooking the thin green stream. She sits. The rain patters and slows and stops. The smell of wet dust and warm dog-shit and cut grass. Tiny air bubbles float on the water then silently pop. She opens a can.

...

She watches some videos then drinks and she falls onto the bed like a haphazard pile of pick-up sticks. She sleeps and wakes at five or so, puts the breakfast news on, retches for half an hour then drinks the last two beers and sleeps a while longer. When she wakes again she sits, dazed, on the steps of the caravan then walks back to the shop to buy a dozen cans. Her father hasn't been home for a while. She drinks, sleeps, drinks, watches the breakfast news and retches with the bathroom door open, leaning her head against the ceramic as her stomach dryly convulses.

There is a shop closer to the house but he turns the fridges off overnight and the beers are always warm first thing. The shakes are bad, her legs unsteady, so at eight she goes for four warm cans and tries to make them last. She holds off until three and then sets off beside the High School, out beside the church. She picks up another dozen, nine for the evening and three cold ones to steady herself first thing.

Her thighs are often numb in the mornings, leaden and unresponsive, and the first shop run gets more and more trying. She falls down a lot. Her bladder is unpredictable and her hot bowels loosen with alarming immediacy and often she has to squat behind parked cars or a garden shed and a couple of times she has to shit under the skirts of the willow tree on the putting green. She starts putting toilet roll down her knickers and then she buys some pads and wears them and twice a day she gets back from the shop quivering and whimpering, her body failing, drenched in tremulous panic. She drops her bags and collapses in front of the cool glow of the open fridge and the sense of safety and relief is so intense it makes her weep. The booze shrinks everything so that it can take more exclusive care of her and she huddles close to it. She is not unhappy.

At some point her father comes down to the van with a slice of walnut cake. He tells her he's sanding Sandra's floors, doing some work on the bungalow and that he'll be staying

there for a while. She listens to him speak, hands in her lap, a beer at her ankle. He sighs. He turns away and turns back. He tells her to go in the house and she says she's fine out here and he tells her to leave the car alone and kisses her on the forehead. Joe calls a few times but she ignores it. Eventually her phone dies and she doesn't plug it in.

She buys Gaviscon for the acid reflux and keeps it on the little table next to her beer. The pain in her chest, a hard, burning obstruction, pushes her awake in the night no matter how senseless she is, and so she starts sleeping upright with a mound of pillows at her back. She chews her cheeks in her sleep and wakes up with a mouthful of blood. When she remembers to she pushes a ski-sock in her mouth before passing out.

She comes to in a café one morning. Cuppa Coffee, near the train station, a chalice of lager in front of her. The place is empty save the serving girl who's polishing the steamer of the coffee machine. Katherine looks behind herself. It's grey out the window. There is a newspaper open in front of her. The headline is clear. A woman charged with attempted murder. She stares at the front page for a while. Guilt flutters at her pulses and the sick feeling clarifies. She is guilty and here is the evidence, they have found her out. She blinks herself back and looks at the page. The woman with black eyes, the child, the scatter of bloody glass. A man on a bicycle goes past and an apple drops from his panniers and rolls to the gutter. Her eyesight shimmers, the apple doubles and the two of them rest there side by side, identical. She stares at the apples for a long time then she goes outside and crouches over the apple, the one apple, fascinated.

She washes some clothes in the sink with Fairy liquid then remembers there's a machine in the house but when she gets her wet clothes to the back door it all just seems too much so she drops them in the dustbin and wears some of the dresses she found in the old bedroom. It becomes impossible to shower, to stand on one leg or sit and remove her socks,

to get undressed, to wash, to put it all back on again. Now and then she tries to brush her teeth but she keeps poking herself in the face. Her teeth feel raw and her gums are sore and bloody. She decides to make sardines on toast. She tries to mash the fish and flings it all over the place and she can't pick up the kettle or hold a flame to the grill and the more she tries to concentrate the more erratic her body becomes.

One Sunday afternoon she buys a paper with her beers and then she's sitting there with the breakfast news on and the paper unread by her hip. She's confused. It's Sunday morning. She bought the paper in the afternoon. And then she realises that it's the following Sunday. It's things like this, little clues, that help her keep track of the days.

She makes the NEEDAS appointments but it is difficult getting into town. Row has stopped coming. When they change the time for the last of the groups she spends a whole afternoon with a bus timetable on her lap trying to work out when she needs to leave the next morning. She looks at the timetable and her eyes move along it but her eyesight shimmers and the text and the numbers don't add up to anything, she's not building any sense. She takes a swig of Gaviscon, drinks some beer, lights a cigarette and blows smoke out of the less bloody corner of her mouth, her mind blank, then she thinks, *Bus!* and looks back at the timetable. Her eyesight shimmers, the text is meaningless and she forgets what she was doing. She gets a cab in the end and after the meeting Jane takes her aside and says she's being fast-tracked for a detox, that an appointment will come in the post and has she thought about rehab? Katherine doesn't know what's being asked of her.

"You're dying," says Jane. "You're killing yourself."

She dimly sees the truth of this and yet it seems like an exaggeration, or the seriousness and sadness with which Jane says it seems affected. It doesn't tally with the watery emptiness of her days, days she spends with her videos, watching them from the

middle or the end or wherever. She fantasises or daydreams a lot, vague, unspecific collections of feelings which she swoons in and out of and she thinks about Russia, “Mother Russia!” she says aloud, often, and she flings up a hand and she thinks, vaguely, about the big serious books she loved so much and it’s like she is living in the strange, almost-memory of a rich and exciting dream and sometimes she is overwhelmed by how beautiful it must have been as she sits numbly on the couch dribbling onto her thighs.

It’s a chilly August. The days are grey and it rains a lot. She leaves all the windows open until one night when it’s black out and the wind buffets the van and she gets out of bed for no real reason and collapses on the bedroom floor. She lies here crying or laughing while her stomach convulses and then she crawls through to the front room, spritzes the place with Airwick, closes all the windows and crouches in front of the little gas fire. She fiddles around with it and finally gets it lit and the warmth is strange and lovely. She pulls her quilts through and makes a nest on the floor and sets a beer by her hands.

She sleeps.

11.

Characters do emote. Katherine emotes.

And certain rules are adhered to.

...

Her front door is open, the jamb splintered. She never really unpacked so there isn't much mess to be made, but what could be scattered around has been. The bathroom door is closed. She hears a man clear his throat, spit, rinse it away.

She leaves and walks up through the alley, through the housing estate. It rained at some point. She stops to look at the shallow puddle at her feet, admires the still blue-white sky in the water's reflection, then she tries to remember what she was doing and crosses for the off-licence.

The Pakistani guy on the counter gives her a nod. There are house bits down the end, tape measures and lightbulbs, a black rubber bucket full of machetes with black blades and yellow cloth sheathes. She pauses at the fridges and handles a can of beer, heavy and cold, like someone else's loaded gun. She takes her machete to the counter. The guy tills it in. She tops up her Oyster card, buys cigarettes and sits on the wall out front, the machete between her thighs. She takes out her phone. She thinks of calling Magdalena, of going into work. She is due back tomorrow and she could sleep in the gallery or in the Patron's Room, she could pace the bare boards in the middle of the night, swinging the machete by her side.

She walks back to the house, pushes the door open with the sheathed machete and wanders about, poking the couch, the bookshelves. There is the lingering smell of a shit in the toilet, the cistern still filling itself. She props the blade against the wall, brushes out the toilet bowl, puts the plug in the bath and opens the hot tap, then she sits on the side of the bath and cries. She tries not to imagine anything and the steam envelops her until she cannot see. She

takes off her clothes and tries to step into the scalding water but her ankle revolts, her body refuses, and she turns the tap off and paces the front room, naked, cold, the house too quiet. She feels sick and guilty, as though she has had a drink, and she stands still in the middle of the room trying to locate the feeling, trying to surround it and see what it is made of.

There isn't even a kitten I can feed, she thinks, and this is both a very funny thought and a very sad one. She isn't sure what to do with herself so she rings Debbie, who doesn't answer, and then Tanya calls her and she's crying and she takes a long time to say anything.

"I'm sorry, Katherine. I told him where you live. And about Tommy."

She doesn't say anything for a while and eventually Tanya stops crying.

"Are you okay?" says Katherine.

"Yes. You need to speak to your friend. Tell him."

"Yes."

They talk a while longer and then Katherine fries a couple of eggs and eats the hard yolks with a teaspoon. She phones a locksmith and watches him work.

...

We become fluent, we are fluent in this film, and there is a kinetic recall:

The boy.

...

She dashes her change in the tray and walks through the arches. The security guard wipes the baton across her and waves her through. She pockets her phone and the money and

Tom comes out of the loos fastening his belt. He's smart, a polo-neck sweatshirt, drainpipe jeans. He points at his face as she approaches. They hug, he holds her by the shoulders.

"Fuck happened to you?"

"I had a fight," she says.

"See that."

"You okay?" she says.

"Yeah. Just a review. Judge threw out me last robbery, seeing as I was on my way into rehab. Wanted me in a year down the line, make sure I ain't robbed any security vans in the meantime."

He buys her a cup of coffee from the vending machine and they take them out front. A gothic courthouse, the bricks new and reddish, the garden overgrown.

She starts to tell him about her job, that she works in a gallery, that she's a manager and she has a lanyard and a smartphone but it drifts away from her, she finds it hard to stay interested enough or convinced enough that this evidence of progress, that the two of them have changed, are different to the people who met in rehab. She tries. "I won a prize," she says.

"Yeah?"

"Yes."

"What'd you win?"

"Money."

"For something you wrote?"

“Yes,” she says. “For something I wrote.”

“Gonna read me something?”

She downloaded the manuscript to her phone and so she finds the file and reads to him. *“Things happen, and then other things happen, and as she begins to story things this way, with a quiet fervour, she begins to formulate an opinion of herself, to measure each moment against a better alternative, to give weight to the cumulative disparity between what she could have been and what she is.”*

“You made that up?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds proper. Very writerly.”

“I know.”

“Fuck knows what it means.”

“You already know.”

“Know what?”

“Everything,” she says.

“Ta very much.”

She laughs.

“You’re tryna save the world,” he says.

“From what?”

He finishes his coffee and squashes the cup.

“Someone is looking for you.”

“Someone’s always looking for me.”

“Asra,” she says. “He killed your brother.”

“How’d you know that?”

“I met his wife. In Brighton.”

“How?”

“She was dancing. We made friends. I saw her again the other day, when I went to collect my prize. She told me her husband was looking for someone.”

“For me.”

She nods. There is a long pause during which he appears to be weighing something up, then he looks at his hands, looks her in the eyes and says, “I don’t understand why you don’t care.”

“About what?” she says.

“I don’t know,” he says. He looks up. “I found out where he lived. Asra. Met him at a meeting, of all fucking places. Didn’t recognise him. I shook his hand, made him a cuppa. After the meeting Jean comes over, says, Know who that was? I called it on. Called me big brother. We went round there, knock on the door. Me brother sticks a gun in his belly, I stick another one under his chin. Both pulled the trigger. Both guns misfired.”

Pause.

“I thank God every day,” he says.

...

He stands in the box and she sits in the front row. She remembers or tries to remember the last time she was here, in court, giving evidence in Kyle's favour, giving him an alibi. It was a lie. She lied. He was found not guilty and then he went to jail anyway, something else, an assault, drugs, she can't remember. And before that, with Bob, she took the stand and lied then as well. She wonders if she feels anything distinct about that fact. She is quite moved by it all, the ceremony, the stereotypical profile of this judge, middle-aged, white, well-spoken. It is charming, in its way.

"Be seated," says the judge.

He looks through Tommy's files. "So, Mr Harty. We are here for a review."

"Your honour."

"I suspended the sentence, quite against my better judgment, on the condition that we'd meet on a yearly basis and be absolutely sure you were staying out of trouble."

Pause.

"I've been looking over your file again. Done time in more or less every prison in the south of England."

"Yes, your honour."

"A very versatile man, by all accounts."

"Versatile?"

"Try your hand at anything."

"Your honour."

“As I see it, the criminal justice system spent the best part of twenty-five years trying to convince you to reform, and it didn’t make a blind bit of difference. So my question to you, Mr Harty, is this: What happened?”

...

They take a bus down to Canning Town. He points out his old haunts, the places he robbed, the fights he was in, and she feels her own past move through her also.

“Sometimes I want to go back,” she says.

“Where?”

“Macready’s.”

“Romford Road,” he says.

She nods. “I drank there,” she says. “I feel I should go back sometimes, peel back the carpet and film the bloodstains against the cement.”

“Used to stay in a crack-house down the road from there. Fact, while you were drinking yourself into the ground, I was probably round the corner, lump of crack on one knee, revolver on the other.”

She takes his hand, the fingers bent and scarred. It is true that he could be anyone and she feels suddenly estranged from him, though this does not make her love him any less. She remembers standing in the middle of the group room, an exercise they had asked her to perform, a presentation about her mother. And she stood there, thinking, *who are these people?* She could go back to Macready’s and drink or she could do something else, she could move to Russia, outstay her visa, disappear. She feels lost and she reminds herself

nothing has changed. She looks at the traffic lights beyond the window, the clear angles of the roofs, the cheerful red post-box.

12.

She can't deal with coins in the shops so she's paying with notes and throwing her change in a bowl. She empties it across the floor and tries to count it. Her father knocks on the door.

"Just a second," she says. Her voice comes out halting and unsure of itself. A movie plays on the television. She watches it for a moment. She can't remember putting it on. She turns it off and puts her can behind the TV. She flaps the back of her hand over the skirt of her dress, spritzes herself with her chalky aloe deodorant. She can't think of anything else. She opens the door.

"Happy birthday, darling."

Pause.

"Thanks."

"I've made lunch."

She nods her head. It's hard to work out the time and then she remembers what he said, that it's lunchtime. She doesn't want to leave the van. It's warm and sunny out. Her dad's in a white shirt and some cheap new jeans. He's shaved and nicked his chin. She touches his chin, squints, smiles, says as casually as she can, "Thanks. I'm okay though."

He licks his thumb, smears the blood from his chin and says, "Come and have some lunch with me, Katherine."

...

She sits behind a white plate. The fruit-bowl's full of small apples and big tight oranges. There is a glass bowl of salad, a little china dish of black olives in a puddle of stained brine, some quartered boiled eggs on a tea-plate. It looks nice and the house is tidy

and it smells of ham and air freshener. Her dad brings through a chopping board with a steaming ham on it, a few thick slices taken off.

“Do you want some coffee?”

She nods. She looks at her lap. He brings through a percolator and pours some bitty black coffee into her mug. He goes to the kitchen and comes back again with a present and a card in a pink envelope.

“Thank you.”

She puts the present and the card to one side and her father helps himself to some food and she puts her hand on her mug. The thin bone in her forearm feels nervous. Her eyes sting and she has that thick metallic taste in her mouth which is a thirst that water doesn't get rid of. She surprises her hand into quickly picking up a roll and putting it on her plate. There's a serving fork with one bent tine next to the ham.

“S'cuse me.”

She fingers up a warm slice of ham but it wasn't a surprise this time. Her arm spasms. Spots of juice fling across the table. The ham pats onto her plate. Her dad squashes a roll and takes a bite. Katherine sucks some coffee.

“Do you need a beer, Katherine?”

She meets his eyes. She nods.

He comes back with a Stella, opens it for her and sets it by her plate.

“Sorry if I'm a fuck-up.”

“You're not a fuck-up.”

“Sorry anyway.”

“Open your present.”

She smiles. “It’s a book.”

“Yeah.”

She uses both hands on her beer and then slides the card from the envelope. It says, *Happy Birthday* in silver letters across the front.

“It’s not a brilliant card,” he says.

The phone rings and they listen to it ring then they listen to the short recorded message on the answering machine and there’s a beep and then her mother’s voice.

“I was calling for Katherine... I’ll call back.”

“She won’t,” he says. They laugh a little.

“That’s rotten of me,” he says. “I’m sure she will.”

She smiles and tilts her beer with both hands. She drinks.

“When are you going away?”

“Soon,” she says. “They’re. They’ve recommended. That I go to rehab.”

“What do you think?”

She shrugs.

“I think that’s a really good idea, Katherine.”

She doesn't want to feel tearful but she does. He has made an effort. She is drunk and she would like to be more drunk and she would also like to sit here and be sober and think of something cheerful to say. There is the idea of a family somewhere in the background, the three of them, together, enjoying each other's company.

Her father touches her chin. He says, "You're a lovely young woman, you know."

She clenches her teeth and looks at her hands. Her eyesight wobbles. She's twenty-four.

13.

We are not watching a saint, and that's good.
But how peculiar that we should need reminding of that.

...

She's on the edge of remembering something and it's good and strange to be on the edge of remembering something that isn't there. She likes being out in the cold. She walks down the High Street, pauses, finds herself clearly against the clean glass of the closed Pound Shop. It is very late. A car slides down the hill. She watches it pass. It drags something in its wake, something in her heart, they are intimately attached – she and the car – and then it's gone, she is alone. She looks up. The sky is clear, like it rarely is in London. Those are stars, white and small. And she is here. She pauses for so long that there is no longer any meaning to her standing here, her thoughts have run out, leaked away, as though she were trying to direct them somewhere far away and they have travelled for too long in the cold, so long that they lose all context, they are no longer themselves.

She locates herself. It is silly to be standing here so she keeps walking, she scantily instructs herself to do so and she is, which is very strange, and she projects the strangeness to her legs and they keep moving nonetheless. The hill evens off and there on the corner is the cafe in which she came to not long ago, hands between her thighs, a newspaper open before her. She is not drunk though it is still there at her peripheries, the suffocating blankness of it, removing her from herself. There is a streak of panic when she thinks that she will be withdrawing but she isn't withdrawing, her body is okay.

She stops at the cafe. It is utterly dark inside. She checks her pockets. She bought a ticket and the ticket shows an open return, London to Dovercourt, and she remembers that she has a room in Hackney, that she left the caravan after getting some help from NEEDAS,

that she was signing on at the police station in Plaistow until she got too sick, until her barrister had her exempted.

She looks down at the hold-all beside her and right here, at the crossroads, she checks the money and as she handles the bundles she recounts its progress but loses track. Buried, exhumed. The life of Christ.

Bow down at the crossroads and kiss the earth you have defiled.

She walks down to the station and stands on the platform. It is empty. The brick wall beside her smells of piss. The oil refinery after the long stretch of wasteground is smudged with lights. She sits on the cold bench. She opens a beer and drinks. It's good. Her legs are okay for now. A train pulls in. No one gets off. The driver leans out the window.

"Going Harwich first," he says. "But if you're London-bound you can get on now if you like."

"Thanks," she says. He looks her up and down and then the train moves away and what attached her to him – his gaze – is broken. He went with himself and she stayed here, and the completeness of her separation from him is overwhelmingly strange.

The moment passes. She climbs the metal stairs onto the bridge and pauses on it for a while. There are the docks over the way, a big cruise-liner pulling in or out, the cranes static against the sky. She crosses, comes down onto Cypress Road. A fox noses some bins, pauses and looks up at her, its eyes violet in the moonlight.

...

She could stop at any of these houses or at none of them. She could knock on any door and some would be unanswered and at others people would come to the door squinting

with sleep or showing on their faces the trace of a conversation they have just left. “Let me get the door.”

She finds the right one. She pauses at the gate. The bag feels heavy. She is holding the straps of the bag and the can of beer in the same hand. She lifts the beer and the bag and tries to drink. It is awkward. She puts the bag down.

“One at a time,” she says.

Yes, be orderly about this.

She finishes the beer. She sets it on the wall. She walks to the door, presses a doorbell that feels empty because no sound issues from it. She knocks on the door. A hallway light brightens the transom. She steps back, measuring her distance, trying to encourage some kind of appropriateness in the distance between her and the door, trying to organise the sequence. He answers. It- the scene- is much like it was, for now. He is in his boxers and a t-shirt. He’s bald and there is an immediate scar on his scalp, right down to the middle of his eye-line. The scar wasn’t there last time because just after they knocked on this door they put it there, live, open, bleeding, and that’s where the scar is now, vibrant and fused to him.

“Katherine,” he says. His eyes empty out, his face tightens. Pause. “What you doing here?”

She doesn’t say anything.

He nods at the bag. “Come to finish the job?”

She shakes her head. He copies her then he steps aside and she walks down the hall, an elbow halfway, then the kitchen. She snaps the light on, takes a brown mug from the draining board and pours some water. She puts the bag on the square table against the wall

then turns back to the sink. She drinks her water. She watches his reflection in the black window. She tips the rest of the water in the sink, rinses her cup and puts it back where it was.

She turns to him. She has the feeling that this has already been done, that whatever she came here to do or say has already finished, and she interrupts herself walking towards him as though to leave. He steps back. She pauses. She has left him behind. How to get him to the place where it has all already finished?

Direct yourself at the sky, she thinks. Your thoughts will get cold and you will leave behind a context you are convinced is all you are.

He says again, "What you doing here?"

He's her father's age and she wonders if she will go to see her father from here, if she will go back to London. She wonders where she will stay tonight and then she puts all that down and says, "I came to see you."

He nods.

"I'm on trial."

"I know," he says.

"Do you think I should go to prison?"

"It looks like that's what's happening," he says.

"Yes," she says.

He scratches his head, lightly. He is still getting used to the scar. "What you done," he says. "It was cruel. Those other boys. What they done."

She nods. He's right. There's nothing ambiguous about it. She is overwhelmed with shame and so she says it. "I am overwhelmed with shame. Standing here."

"That's right," he says. "That's how you're supposed to feel. Those others, Joe, the other two. They don't care."

She wonders if that's true. There is no purchase, they are too blank for her, the other two, and Joe is so bound to the story of her, of Kyle, Bob's son, that to unravel it all and get at anything sincere would be fruitless. Suddenly she does not know what sincerity means, how to attach the idea to words without engaging with a story that is beside the point.

"I crawled," he says. "Up to the misses, trail of blood behind me." His teeth are gritted, he even makes a fist. She smiles, helping him to step away from that, and he sighs.

He leaves the room and comes back with some cigarettes. His hands are shaking. He puts a cigarette in his mouth and taps his thighs, nodding his head, as though he's forgotten what the gesture connotes. There is a blank pause. He remembers. He cusses quietly. She flicks her lighter and holds the flame to him. He leans into it, turns his back on her, turns to her again, dithering.

"Ah," he says. "Fuck sake. Come. Sit down."

She follows him into the front room. The TV is muted. A stuffed ashtray on the coffee table, a bottle of whisky. He pours a few inches into a tumbler, sits on the couch, flicks his fingers towards the doorway. She pauses.

"A cup," he says. "Get yourself one."

They sit side by side. He stares at the television so she stares at it as well. She sips her whisky and can't help but look to the bottle, a third or so left. It won't be enough. She tries not to worry, there are beers in the bag, she has money.

"I bought the money back," she says.

"I don't want it."

"I'll leave it anyway," she says.

"Give it to the boy. To Kyle."

She nods her head. "I'll just leave it here."

"You're in court in the morning."

"I know," she says. "It's your turn, on the stand."

He nods. He finishes his whisky. She feels as though something is balancing on this moment and she would like to tip it away, to relax, to drink with him. It seems a shame that things have to be resolved first, and she wonders at how peculiar it is, that she could do this differently, take a knife, for example, and threaten to kill him if he doesn't change his story. One thing could happen, or something else entirely could happen. How strange that she should or could feel one way or another about it, and that each would lead to conclusions and behaviours that would compel and shape still more possibilities. Or she could step away from it all and just watch it happen around her. She looks at him. His arms, too, are scarred.

There is no doubt about it. Things happen.

...

She is very drunk by the time she leaves. She walks down to the beach and stands at the sea wall. Rough waves fling themselves against the concrete, flecking her with spray, the wind harsh. She sleeps in the shelter by the boating lake, wakes up at dawn and walks, freezing and hungry, down to the train station. The first train is just after six. Her phone's dead. She walks back to the High Street but the clock on the tower is still, the hands showing midday or midnight, so she walks back to Bob's and wakes him up. He runs her a bath. She sleeps on the couch and when she wakes he's in the kitchen eating some scrambled eggs.

"Want some?" he says.

She shakes her head.

"Have some."

He fetches another plate, slides some eggs onto it and cuts his toast in half. They eat. It's nice. The eggs are salty. He points to the counter with his fork.

"Bought you some bits," he says. "Pair of jeans. Shirt."

"Thank you."

The clock on the wall shows half nine.

"Be there for eleven," he says.

She nods.

He tells the judge that despite what he said in interview, he has never seen her before in his life.

14.

She shakes Matt's fingers. He nods. Lee nods behind him and she follows the three of them through to the dining room. Joe puts a green canvas tool-bag on the table. She looks up at the clock but forgets to see what time it is. It's late anyway. Matt and Lee put bags of beers on the table. Matt pulls a chair out and sits down. He's surly, sullen, the temperament of a drug dealer. Katherine knows him from school, from around. He takes a wrap from his jacket pocket. She doesn't know Lee, they've never met. She heard a story about him, something Joe told her or that she read in the local paper. How he threw a swan at an oncoming lorry and shouted, "Who wants a swan?"

She goes to the bathroom. It's dark. It smells of soap, a bar of it in the well of the sink. She looks at the mirror. She can't remember coming over here, to the house. She was sitting on the couch when they knocked, the light on, a cigarette in the ashtray. She looks down at herself. She's not in her dress. Jeans, a sweatshirt. She looks at the floor. She thinks of nights in the cold bathroom, the light off, pushing a t-shirt around the bloody floor with one foot, her arm dripping, tidying up before bed, pissed, fifteen, sixteen.

She hears a beer click open and their hushed voices fade back in, the click of a lighter. She steps out into the hallway, her hands flashing to her chest to catch the hoody Joe throws at her. It's her dad's. Joe is standing in front of the washing machine with his hands on a pile of folded laundry. She waits for his eyes but he doesn't look up.

He says, "Put it on."

She does.

Lee is standing by the table drinking a can, a machete in his spare hand, the brown blade pointing at the floor.

Joe follows her in and Matt says, “She’s coming then?”

Joe nods.

She holds her hand out for Matt’s beer. “Give me that please.”

He looks at her. He’s fat. He needs a shave. Joe opens a beer and passes it to her then he takes a set of nunchuks from the tool-bag and holds them out. She takes them. The plastic handles are black and heavy, a thick chain between them. She puts them on the table.

“No,” she says. “I don’t want these.”

Lee lights a cigarette and walks over to the window. He’s skinny, nervous.

Matt takes a hatchet from the bag. The wooden pommel is splintered, dog-chewed. The blade is dull and rusty. She takes it. It’s heavy.

...

She wipes a throwaway razor across her legs and stands in the stall, trying to bend the sprung plastic and free the blade.

...

They do a few lines. They don’t say much and then Matt tells her what she’s going to do. She thinks about going back into the bathroom, sitting on the edge of the bath or going back to the van, sitting in the dark somewhere, in the quiet. The boys put on black balaclavas. They roll the faces up.

...

They walk up beside the High School. It’s dark but there’s a moon and she keeps her eyes low, following Joe’s heels. The coke has helped but it won’t last and she tries not to

think about her legs. She swings the axe beside her and when they reach the road Joe puts the nunchuks in the back pocket of his jeans. Lee saunters across the empty road swinging his machete beside him and she follows.

They clatter over the bridge, over the railway line. The guys roll their balaclavas down. The streets into Old Harwich are narrow and samey and they go left then right or the other way around and then the street widens and the end of it opens out to the sea, which is a fine violet pencil-line. There's a fox in the road. It stares at them.

The boys walk up a short garden path, the gate collapsed open. They stand in a squashed line against the wall, beside the door. Curtains drawn across the bay window, a ribbon of light down the middle.

Katherine walks to the door with her fist behind her back, the blade of the hatchet fitting neatly between her shoulder-blades. The door's black, an empty screw-hole at the top of a faded nine. She knocks. She tucks her hair into the hood, pulls the hood down, eyes low. She knocks again. The hallway light snaps on. The door opens. He's in a pair of greyish boxers, his top bare, a smudge of greenish tattoo over his breast. He looks poor and drunk.

"Steve there?"

He looks at her and blinks heavily. She shoulders his chest and he gives and she stumbles past him. He turns back to the door and tries to close it but one of them throws themselves at the door and she puts a hand on his thick shoulder and tries to pull him round. The machete drops down through the gap in the door. A squat red eye bursts open on his forearm. She raises the hatchet and lets it fall onto the back of his neck. A ten-inch tentacle of fat bursts through his skin. Blood falls from it in a sheet. He stumbles back and she backs up with him. He falls on his bum, arms up, hands out. The door flings wide and smacks the wall.

Joe swings the nunchuks and clocks him hard round the head. Lee nudges past and drops the machete down on his shoulder and Katherine turns away, turns right, goes through the open doorway, into the front room, leaving him bleeding, sitting in his his grubby underpants with his hands out, grizzling, “You’re gonna fuckin’ kill me, ent ya!”

“Nah,” says Lee, “We ent gonna fuckin’ kill ya, you old cunt.”

Wet scudding swipe of the machete on flesh. Dull fucking wallop of the nunchuks.

Katherine stands behind the door and looks at the ugly dumb blade in her hand and she says quietly, “Fuck.”

The boys drag him through to the kitchen. Katherine listens to glass and crockery breaking. He shrieks and sobs. Someone runs up the stairs and smashes stuff up and then runs back down again. She looks around the door to see Lee pass by with his arm out straight, the machete pointing at the kitchen, his hand red.

“Where’s the fucking money!”

Katherine moves on the spot and bounces the hatchet. There’s no blood on it. She looks at the room. The floorboards are bare, a border of black adhesive. A low coffee table, a bottle of Grouse, cigarettes, a full ashtray. There’s a black leather armchair just inside the door and a couch along the wall with a glass box on the end seat, a thin green snake curled up inside. A film on the TV, the sound low. An off-kilter paper shade over the light.

They bring him through to the front room and drop him in the armchair. He sits forward with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. Blood pisses through his fingers, runs down his forearms and his shins and puddles around him. His lip quivers. Blood pours over his open shoulder. He’s covered in it. Joe stands in front of him and puts the nunchuks in the back pocket of his jeans. He looks at the blood around his feet then steps out

of the puddle, leaving another print on the boards. Lee is standing at the fireplace going through a short stack of bank-cards. He takes a Superking from the box on the coffee table, rolls the balaclava up over his nose and lights a cigarette. Matt takes out his phone, points it at Bob and takes a picture. Bob whines, whimpering. He dribbles black on the floor. Everyone's more or less quiet and then Matt takes a craft-knife from his pocket and slides a portion of the blade up with his thumb. He looks at Katherine. She takes the blade from him and pulls it across the top of Bob's head. His scalp splits open from the crown and he slaps his hands to his head and shrieks and Matt says, "Bob, you'll tell us where the money is or we'll cut your fucking head off."

"It's in the bathroom. Now fuck off. Please. Fuck off."

She thumbs the blade away and puts the craft-knife in her back pocket. Lee drops his cigarette on the floor and goes to get the money.

She can't tell the blood from the blood. She looks away from him, looks down at herself, shakes her head and says quietly, "The light is on and we're all just standing here."

No one seems to hear her.

Lee whistles from the hallway, "Yep."

She follows Joe out of the house.

...

Her body feels erratic but she keeps her eyes low and walks. They fan out across the road, Lee swinging the money bag, the machete, K. with her axe, the sky black and clear.

...

Lee empties the money onto the kitchen table. Katherine feels sick. She closes her eyes and steadies it.

They crowd around the bathroom sink splashing water on their bloody hands and wrists, the tools in the bath with the hot tap on.

Matt knocks up some lines on the table-top and Joe finishes stacking the money into four piles.

“Seven each, assuming they’re grand bundles.”

Matt does a line, says, “Count them.”

“You can if you like.”

They get ready to go.

“Leave me some beers,” says Katherine. “And the coke.”

They look at each other and then Matt puts the beers on the floor, tosses the wrap across the table. He touches Joe’s fist with his own.

...

She pulls a chair out and sits on the craft knife, takes it from her back pocket and puts it between them. She opens a beer. Joe scratches the cocaine into two small lines.

“That’s the last of it.”

“We’re gonna get pinched,” she says.

“He won’t press charges.”

“We’re still gonna get pinched.”

...

Joe takes the tools with him and as it starts to get light she rinses out the bath and the sink, puts the empty cans in the bin, takes the rubbish out and neatens up the van. She checks her clothes over, turning this way and that in front of the mirror. She stands over the toilet. She goes through the motions but the heavens don't take hold so she leaves it, packs a few things, locks up the van and goes back to the house. She puts the craft-knife in her bag, the last of the beers, the book, stuffs the money on top and phones a cab.

"Where are we going?"

"The hospital."

He nods in the mirror. At the top of Cliff Road she changes her mind.

"Here's fine."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

She pays and walks down to the High Street, past Cuppa Coffee, a rotten apple in the gutter.

The single platform is empty. Big yellow seconds fold over each other. Over the track there's waste-ground and then the oil refinery and she watches the early morning, pink and misty. The London train slides in.

...

The Indian says, "No blood this time."

She looks at him. His hands are wide on the desk. A beautiful bright morning floods into the lobby. He sucks on his moustache. He means Dennis, the boy from the room, because she's back here, back where she started, Macready's, a B&B on the Romford Road.

"Okay," she says. "No blood."

Part Three

1.

It never occurs to her how lonely she is. And tired. Her body is tired. She's bent double round the side of the pension, weeping. Her organism- she

...

She comes out of the lift in the corridor on level six, expecting to be somewhere else. She pauses and looks at her hands, turning them over as though instructed. She is here because she was there, it is as simple as that. She walks to the East Room and stands still in the middle of the room. The time is there on the old cathedral and it's true, that is the time. The expectation comes back, the feeling that she is not where she expected to be. And in the middle of this feeling she understands very clearly what a compelling work of art she is.

...

She turns herself in the office chair and watches the trees outside. Magdalena has gone home and so Katherine is the most senior member of staff in the building. The supervisor's call her, asking if they can send people home early, asking her questions about payroll. She stays in the office for an hour or so, looking out the window, writing fragments on the pages of her scratchpad. She does the rounds. Mara is cleaning the lines on level six. She could not find a hose so she is using wide pans to fill the standing water bottle. Katherine helps. They spill water across the floor as they tilt the pans. The second time is better and soon they are good at it. She goes down to the bar, takes a Diet Coke and chats to Saule and Fabio then she walks outside, past the flags advertising the current exhibitions, past the collapsed black parasols cinched at the waist with orange cords, into the staff garden where she smokes a cigarette and looks at the tight grain on the grey picnic bench, leaning close to

the wood until the perception is a light pressure on her eyes. Look at it closely enough, and everything is what it is. The cat comes over and she thinks of her kitten, the kitten she gave away, so she starts texting Chris, deletes the message and sits here with the memory of being lost, of coming out in the East Room with the faintly anxious sense that she should have been somewhere else. She remembers the time on the old cathedral, that she is not where she expected to be, and then she thinks about going away, that soon she will be somewhere else entirely, another country, Russia, and she remembers flinging up a hand in the caravan and dropping change in a bowl above the cooker. She wanted to go away, back then, to prove to herself that she cared about something powerfully enough that she would go to Russia in pursuit of it. And what are the reasons now? She comes up with a few and, completely without consequence, she discards them. What are they really made of, reasons, motives? Nothing. She can invent one later on, if there is a need, and if she wants to believe in it, she will.

She walks in through the loading bay, around the whole gallery through back of house, and in her own department the guys are closing down, the place is empty, and a bloody sunrise spreads across the sky, obscured by the tall buildings, their blue glass eased by a roseate glow. She thanks the guys, checks their close-down, signs them out and phones her mother.

“Did I care,” says Katherine. “When I was younger?”

“About what?”

Pause.

“I don’t know.”

“Kyle said you gave him the house.”

“I said he could stay there with you.

“I need some help, Katherine.”

She sits down. She looks at her feet. She says, “I will help you if I can.”

She wanders around the room. The roseate glow slides off the buildings as the moon clarifies. A sudden spike of love or longing goes through her and she slips back into it, refocusing her perspective, and she texts Joe’s phone, allowing herself to say things which are immediately tinged with a sleek redness of shame: *I wonder if you and I could be together, Joe. If we could make a house and be a couple. We could look after one another.*

She sends the message and immediately wants to send more. She reads through the history of them, navigating her way through her messages the way she navigates through the gallery, compelled by a feeling that she is moving with purpose, that the things she is saying, the things she encounters, are meaningful because they have happened, even though she is lost much of the time.

She curls up on the pistachio couch in the Patron’s Room.

2.

There's nothing at all while she stares at the pattern of grey handprints on the ceiling and then she soaks slowly through the absence. She moans. She pushes a clammy palm up the wall, smudging the pencilled message scribbled there, *I'ma pick up da world...*

She holds her phone by her face, closes one eye then the other and eventually the display settles and she gets the time. It's just after six am. She's been asleep for twenty hours.

She stands up and collapses beside the bed, her hands squashed under her face. She tries to pull her legs up, do something with them, arrange herself. Nothing happens. She tries to reason with herself but it seems like a pointless thing to do. The legs either work or they don't. She forearm her way to the corner and leans against the sink. She pulls her bag over, folds her legs crossed and opens a beer. It's warm. She drinks.

She puts the can beside herself and tries to swallow down the heaves. She climbs up the sink and leans over it. Her hands slip and she lands more or less cross-legged with a palm-full of frothy vomit. She reaches up and splats it in the sink. She needs to piss so badly it aches. She looks in her bag. Two left.

She gets herself onto the edge of the bed, pulls on her jeans and palms her eyes clear. She inches up the window and the smell of the day drifts in. It is a beautiful blue morning, crisp and bright.

She is weak through hunger. She needs to eat. She pockets her phone then tests herself by standing up with one hand on the mattress. She tries to reason with her legs but it feels like a pointless thing to do, they either work or they don't. She walks across the room, hips the sink, leans against the wall and opens the door, then she slides along the hallway

collecting a black frieze of dust on her hip. She pees then slopes through to the breakfast room. It is empty. She leans in the archway.

Her phone rings. Joe. She lets it ring off and looks at the high narrow window at the end of the room, the day beyond it. A text: *He's in Romford trauma unit.*

The sick feeling in her heart reveals itself in the shape of a word: Murder.

He is not dead. Free of this daunting gravity her mind reels. She sways on the spot and sighs and though she is leaning pretty uselessly in the archway she feels better and lighter and she tells herself that this will be okay, she'll weather it. Nevertheless, she sighs again and apparently genuine tears prick her eyes. Something like panic makes her jaw quiver.

She steadies herself, pushes off from the archway and walks across the wide lobby but she is leaning to one side and then she is on the floor again. She pulls herself over to the wall, the doors wide open, the forecourt empty. She stands and totters quickly to reception. The Indian guy is sitting on a swivel chair in the dim narrow office just to the right. He puts a paperback novel aside and comes through wiping a tear from one eye, smiling.

"My dear, good morning."

"Morning. It's a sad book?"

"Very sad, yes."

She smiles. "I need some help."

"What's the matter? You're sick?"

"Yes, I am."

"You need some help to your room?"

“I need some drink. I can’t get to the shop.”

He shakes his head.

“No, you don’t need to drink.”

“It’s medicine. I need it.”

He helps her back to the room, sits her on the bed and stands in front of her shaking his head. He smiles lightly.

“This is no good.”

She asks him to pass up her bag. She gives him some money and recites a very simple shopping list. He caresses the money and shakes his head and says again, “This is no good.”

“I need to straighten myself out a bit. If I stop outright I’ll be in worse shape than I am now.”

He sighs then he’s gone and it’s just her in the room and the poise unclenches from her jaw. The bright crisp day sits beyond the window. She remembers the way she just spoke to the man, a faint panic underscoring the urgency in her voice. She is ashamed.

When he comes back she is sitting on the edge of the bed with her back straight and her hands between her knees, like in hospital, like when she had to convince the psych nurse she was okay.

...

She allows herself two beers and spends the afternoon in bed, writhing. She has the television up loud and daytime TV folds into violent, chaotic dreams. She cries. She pees herself and lays under the work-surface with her knees up, shaking.

Finally it starts getting dark and she opens the brandy. She sits under the window with it and very slowly things mellow and slow to silence.

Joe calls twice more and then he sends a text that says, *Answer your phone*, and he calls again and again she ignores it.

...

The Indian knocks late that night. He has brought her some food in a Tupperware box. She's stood the mattress up against the window and he looks at it and she says, "I had an accident. I'm sorry."

"That's okay. Better?"

"A lot better. Thanks."

"My son's on the front."

He pauses a while so she takes the lid off the food. Some spiced potatoes, chickpea curry, some rice.

"How long have you been here?"

"Many many years," he says.

"Where are you from?"

"Nagpur. India. You know India?"

"No. Do you see interesting things here?"

"People aren't that interesting. People – you, me – funny creatures, very very similar."

“Yes.”

Pause.

“Good night.”

“Goodnight, my dear.”

She eats some of the potatoes with her fingers, walking slowly up and down the room. She is okay. This morning, with her legs, the panic, it was an anomaly.

...

She spends another day and another night getting her average down. The Indian brings her food and she eats in the yard and in the middle of the second night she manages to shower and sits on the front desk while the man's youngest son makes notes for an essay. They talk about Petersburg and share a cigarette on the forecourt.

On the third morning she joins the other guests in the breakfast room. A congregation. She eats a piece of dry toast and looks through a newspaper then she goes out to the yard to smoke a cigarette. The sky is louring and grey and a brisk wind disturbs the dust. Joe calls. She answers.

“Are you okay?”

“Yes,” she says. “Are you?”

“You’re going to get picked up. He identified Matt and Lee, there’s forensics, prints, all sorts. They’ve been remanded. They picked me up last night but had to give me NFA, no charge. I don’t know how, but there’s nothing on us.”

She nods her head. She searches for a question and finds one. “Why did they pick you up, if there’s nothing on us?”

“Someone put our names forward.”

“They told you that?”

“Yes.”

Pause.

“Kyle.”

“Yes,” he says. “Probably. Answer your phone when I call it. Are you okay?”

Pause.

“Katherine?”

...

A list of dead-ends: Psychology, character.

Katherine sitting on the flat silt bay, Orlik. A crossed window. A flat counterpane.

3.

There is a stopover in Riga and then she is approaching Russia. It is very easy to convince herself that she is nostalgic for the land and as the plane glides through cloud and comes clear her heart trips. A band of vivid pink on the horizon, the green-black land below.

The driver is waiting in the lobby with a sign that says, *Katherine*. His English is good. The roads are wide. He nods towards a corner as they pass it.

“*Pravda*,” he says.

“Truth.”

“Yes.”

He slows. A double row of fir trees lead to a square concrete building, the facade lit in changing colours. A theatre. “Semyonovsky Square,” he says. “Where Dostoevsky had his mock-execution.”

He flicks a finger away from the wheel, gesturing to the dome of a cathedral.

“You know why we paint the domes gold,” he says.

“Because you worry that God has forgotten you.”

...

A big iron door with the hotel’s name above it: *Egoiste*. Her driver has gone. She tries the buzzer then sits on the concrete steps and smokes a cigarette. It’s midnight. A young couple open the door and she says good evening and they show her reception. The woman doesn’t speak English and Katherine’s Russian is very simple but they muddle through, she

pays, the woman shows her to her room and the room is very quickly the room she imagined. The bathroom is huge, the tiles heated. She sits on the floor waiting for the bath to fill.

...

She sleeps well, blankly, and in the morning she heads to the *Vitebsky* to collect the car. She drives around the city for a bit then puts the hotel into her phone and drops it off. She's tired. She tries to decide what she needs to write about this, about being here. She looks out onto a courtyard bordered with tall straight trees. The sunlight is strong. There is a car up on blocks and two kids sitting on their heels chatting quietly. She rereads emails from her editor, who is concerned about the novel's unbalanced nature, the sudden violence, the shift from a character-study to a strange, plot-driven drama. The filmmaker dies in St. Petersburg, in the middle of the notes she is making on the film of Katherine's life. Katherine finds the woman dead in the bath. She goes back to London. Time moves backwards. Katherine drops a hatchet onto the back of his neck and is arrested. She starts drinking again. She buries the money.

She opens the rewrite and reads the sequences set in Russia, faintly dreading the redrafting of a suicide. She sits with this feeling, a low sense of unease in her belly, and she is pleased to realise that she has been using this sequence, circling it, trying to write it with ever more swift, clear brevity that it may stand in for something else, that it consumes, neatens and replaces something she is unwilling to approach directly. She admires the dexterity of her psychology for as long as the feeling is potent and then she goes for a walk.

...

There are schoolchildren in the foyer. A cloak-room, a little kiosk with an old lady sitting behind the Perspex.

“Adeen,” says K.

She follows signs, ascends a stone staircase and enters a dimmed room. Flagstones on the ground, glass walls in front of the brickwork with papers between the two, a reproduction of Holbein’s Christ up high on one wall. She stares at the painting. She is not in the mood to attend to it seriously, not in the mood to allow the gravity of its brute violence to weigh upon her and so she is surprised by a tingling feeling at the back of her neck, surprised to find herself opening her mouth as though to give a little gasp, to find tears in her eyes. Immediately she notices the feeling she encourages it and in no time at all she is terribly moved. How easy it is.

She takes a photo of his hat and his desk but the feeling has ebbed away. This is a hat under a glass display case, that’s a writing desk with a green baize cover, an ink-pot, a jotting pad.

There is a bay window with a guest book on the ledge. She looks through the entries.

...

Describing a trajectory we could sensibly call, *The Story of
the Filmmaker’s Life*:

...

She walks up the Nevsky Prospekt to Sadovaya and stops in the Summer Garden just before the Neva. The poplars are in spare leaf and the small leaves look like a fingerprint drawing. The park is like other parks, like walking along the Mall, through St. James’, and she wonders if she misses London and what she would miss if she did. She thinks, too, of Essex, of the High St., the beach, then of the places she stayed in rehab, of east London, and

it all feels the same, recalling these places is like opening a door and letting the air circulate, it's all the same place, in a way.

She heads back to the Church of Our Saviour on Spilled Blood. She takes her phone out and frames it. She doesn't take a photo. She thinks of all the evenings she lived through but which never existed because she was too drunk to lay down the memories. She would stand on the edge of that moment, telling herself that she is just about drunk enough that although she will continue to live through the evening none of it will be recorded, her mind has simply paused in laying down memories.

She pays attention to the trees, how clear they are, the clarity of her presence, and she admires the idea of all those lost evenings, like passages in a novel that, at the time of writing, are clear as day, but which are expunged from the final draft, creating gaps the reader will never be able to close. The filmmaker records herself getting into the bath and fingering a razorblade, then she gets out the bath, she stops recording and she stands there, free of herself. When she presses record again there is no gap, that mute moment between scenes no longer exists. How simple.

Katherine dreams, too, about drinking and in these dreams she has been drinking the whole time, she never did get sober.

There is a restaurant in the park with a seating area in a big conservatory on the back, blinds over the glass roof, a view of the river. She orders a Pepsi and something to eat. She imagines a convincing pull from the churches, dragging in their wake the dim shape of a deity. She entertains the idea that there is a reason for her being here, that this is an attempt at emotional reconciliation or catharsis. Perhaps she feels bad about the past and so she has come here, to Russia, in pilgrimage, a symbolic gesture of penitence, as though her penitence is actualised by her deference towards and concentration on the drama and tragedy of this

country's past. It is an attractive idea which is, finally, rather silly, but, she supposes, all the dramatic gestures we make, all the symbolic attempts to balance or rectify an emotional or spiritual imbalance are arbitrary. We make up these stories to suit us, and so she can use this, if she likes, if she does feel bad, if there are accounts, so to speak, to balance. She thanks herself and laughs. She eats her salad. She could go back to the Church of Our Saviour and spill her blood across the floor and then her blood would be across the floor.

4.

She's not sure which department she is looking for and the corridor dead-ends anyway at a set of secured double-doors. She presses an intercom – "Hello?" – but doesn't know what to say.

She sits on the pavement at an empty ambulance bay. Her body resolves a few times to go back in and she feels the motion ghost through her and with it the excited flush of seeing him, touching his hand, saying something. And what would she say?

She mouths some things until the sounds feel strange. She smokes a cigarette, drinks her can then walks back to the station. The train's waiting.

She stares mutely out the window as Romford turns into Stratford and then she sits on the steps out front the station with the mall behind and she watches the people moving around. A young girl hitches the slack waist of her pink velours, toeing smudged butts, barefoot. She puts out a hand, "Got a pound?"

K. gives her a pound and the girl says thanks and puts her hair behind her ear, revealing a raw burn on the side of her neck.

Katherine crosses the road and walks through the indoor mall. There's a money shop with Nigerian flags and Western Union posters on the window and there is a small travel agent next door. She waits for a woman to finish at the copier.

"How can I help?"

She doesn't pay much attention to the date, she just allows herself to be guided by the woman and when she comes out again and heads back to the station she checks the ticket and takes a *Metro* for the date and realises the flight is twelve days from now.

...

She gets the Overground towards Highbury. She lets herself disappear, wiped clear by the shifting view, exchanging itself for the next moment, and then falling away. She ends up at Victoria where she buys a ticket to Brighton and gets on a train standing at a platform. It sits still for a few minutes. She reads the stops scrolling across the display board. Last stop, Uckfield. She's on the wrong train. The carriage is empty.

She buys a pocketful of miniatures from the refreshments carriage and sips them with her knees against the seat in front. London disappears quite quickly and she watches some of southern England scroll past. Barbed wire fences, fields, a spectrum of grey smeared across the sky. A tepid rainbow. She likes trains. She likes to watch the cables and the tracks. She likes to see workers on the tracks, in their orange vests. She likes seeing them at night when it's cold and dark and they are lit by those dry white lamps, like a Rembrandt. It is so striking and so pleasant.

She gets off at the end of the line. The platform is deserted. A brief High Street runs up a steep hill with a church at the top. She walks the other way, stands a while on a narrow bridge, a shallow river running quickly underneath it. She watches the water, a harsh shallow rush bruising the green stones. She buys cans then turns down an orderly cul-de-sac, climbs an easy fence surrounding a nature reserve and follows a footpath that follows the train-track.

A field of high grass and young green ferns and then a wood which slopes downwards and opens out to a wide leaf-strewn path with high banks full of chestnut trees, aspens and straight birches. Brick bridges periodically diagonal overhead and she marks out the third bridge as a resting point and makes it to the second, her thighs tingling and uncertain, her hip grinding.

She sits among the trees. She scuffs handfuls of chestnut husks and leaves towards herself, making little piles by her hips, nesting. She drinks the tiny gin then opens a beer and closes her eyes. A hysterical tumble of events careen around her, an insubstantial flux of images looped together by a looping blue siren. She thinks of interview rooms and court transcripts, things that once unloosed bind her among themselves, and it seems so unlikely that one simple gesture – the dropping of a hatchet, knocking on a door – can unloose a narrative over which she no longer has any control. It is overwhelming for a moment. She breathes. The sky is there and nothing else is, none of the things she is thinking about. It starts to rain and the rain comes clumsily through the canopy. She drinks a couple of beers and moves on. She feels fine. She could happily do this forever, just wander among the trees.

...

Endurance:

Her body ought to be washed. When she's hungry she fries
two eggs and eats the hard yolks with a tea-spoon.

...

She sleeps in a wood for a while. She gets turned about when she tries to find the path she was on, follows a fractured train-track alongside a broken brick wall and comes out somewhere else. It's evening, the path narrows and then ascends steeply to a sharp bend and as she nears it there are voices, she's amidst a crowd of people, and, as a body, they clear the ascent and come out to a good high view of spread fields with a large white barn over to the left. At the top of the pass she is greeted with a smile by two old ladies in red Macs with a wide umbrella between them. They hand her a glossy A4 programme with a picture of Jesus Christ on the front, a closeup in profile, a crown of thorns on his head. A string of red runs from one dimpled puncture at his temple.

She walks away from the barn. She smiles at a group of young kids on a check blanket wearing wellies and bright raincoats. The rain has paused. One of them, a young woman, holds out a green plastic bowl and Katherine takes it.

She walks over to a treeline, turns back on herself and looks out across the view. People continue to emerge from the mouth of the trail and head for the barn in small groups as the clouds break up and soft sunshine glistens across the fields. Katherine leans against a thick oak tree, one of its high forked branches shattered by lightning. There is a very tall white crucifix in the middle of the field. A girl in a white cardigan sits beside it reading a book. She is alone, well away from the barn and the people filling it. As the wind moves strongly the girl puts her hair behind her ear. The pages of her book move and the girl looks towards the barn and then to the elevated view beyond it. Katherine watches her and feels a strong sense of communion. She fingers a strawberry and bites it. Sweetness bursts along her back teeth. Cream. She toes a yellowy tuft of lamb's wool.

...

Endurance:

A full moon hangs suspended in the clear black sky.

...

She walks down among the trees and digs a hole with her hands. She puts her beers into her satchel. She sets some money aside, wraps the rest of it in the carrier bag and stuffs the bundle and the programme into the hole. She covers it over and looks around herself for something to mark the spot but it's all the same, wood and dirt, everything the same colour. She sits on a rotten log, drinks a beer and smokes a cigarette. She didn't pay enough attention to how she got here. She's not worried about finding the station, she'll get there somehow, but it seems unlikely to her that she'd ever find this spot again. That doesn't seem to matter

though. She clears a rough space on the ground, lies down and looks at the tops of the trees, the leaves mapping the grey sky behind them.

...

She wakes up and walks back out to the clearing. It is almost dark. The moon is full and surrounded by a very intense and deep blue. She looks at the full white moon. The more she stares at it the more peculiar an anomaly it seems, just hanging there in the sky. The grey marks on its surface are continents over which a mirror-Katherine travails.

She leans against the oak tree. The girl has gone. The barn doors are flung open and Jesus in white robes exits, his hands aloft. He's followed out by the period-dressed cast and then the audience or congregation, some of whom are crying. They walk in a body towards wherever, the white light from the moon over all.

...

She stays in a small room in a village pub and wakes up in her pants with her back against a noisy warming radiator, legs out straight. There's a plate of steak and chips on her lap. Wind throws rain against the tiny latticed window. She remembers sitting by an open fire with some old boys, drinking brandy and playing cards. There was a guitar. She spun the nozzles off the lager taps and dropped them in a glass of soda water, helping the landlord close down. The lights were off. There's not much else. She puts the plate aside. Her phone rings. She finds it on the dresser in a bowl of potpourri.

"Miss Goss?"

"Speaking."

"This is DC Cole with Essex Police."

Pause.

“We need to talk to you, Katherine. About an attack that took place in Harwich a few days ago.”

“Okay.”

“Where would be convenient for us to pick you up?”

“Docklands,” she says, thinking of the small planes at London City airport, thinking it’s as good a place as any.

“The campus there.”

...

She gets dressed, washes her face, finds a comb in the bedside drawer and pulls it through her hair and then her phone rings again, her father, and she opens the phone, drinks the last of the warm flat gin and tonic, answers.

“CID have been round with guns looking for you.”

“Yes,” she says. “I know.”

...

Ivana shows her the blood. She directs it to life. Here, she is saying.
And here.

5.

Disorientated, she sits on the edge of the bed with her hand in her hair trying to remember something, trying to place or explain a feeling of anxiety so intense she feels sick. She tries to work out what she might have done that could account for this feeling so that she can work out what to do in order to cancel it. She takes her phone off the side and calls Debbie.

“Katherine. Where are you?”

“Veliky Novgorod.”

“Where?”

“Russia.”

“You okay?”

“Yes.”

Pause.

“I’m with Paul. We are making it work, Katherine. For the baby.”

This is something people say and do, so Katherine nods. She stands by the windows. She scratches her belly. Debbie rearranges her breathing.

“Tell me,” says Debs. “You grew up in a dysfunctional home.”

“Did I?”

“Didn’t you?”

And whatever she was trying to balance with this phonecall shifts and adjusts itself. She is on the phone. There is nothing to say.

...

She looks at the bridges. She drops money into the open case of a violin. She puts in her earphones on The New Arbat and listens to a song, bookmarking the moments, laying the groundwork for future nostalgia.

...

The road thins and disappears. A narrow dirt track. The sat-nav urges her on. She stops for a while. Narrow plank-wood houses with corrugated roofs. Then the road turns to gravel, there's a large wooden arch, some out-buildings and then a complex of wooden cabins on stilts before the lake. She stands around on the veranda for a while and then a man comes and gives her a key.

She unpacks some stuff then goes for a walk. She follows the lake, passes a few houses, some Turkish rugs draped over the fences, a little stall with some boxed eggs, two old women with kerchiefs over their heads sitting on a stoep eating sunflower seeds. A border collie trots alongside her for a while, barking. A brand new Datsun parked by the lake, black and shiny, a guy sitting on the bonnet untangling a length of fishing wire. Some way past him there's a jetty buoyed with plastic drums. The lake is wide. There is an island of firs in the middle of it. She takes off her boots and dangles her feet.

You're going in, aren't you.

"Yes," she says. "I am."

The water is very, very cold. Her chest tightens, she calms herself and evens her breathing as best she can. She floats and looks at the sky and swims for a bit and she's so cold that her elbows give when she tries to lift herself out. She tries again, manages it, gathers her things and walks dripping back to the cabin.

She plugs the boiler in and waits ten minutes then has a warm shower and soaps off the lake smell, her hands grey and stiff. She wraps herself in a quilt and huddles down on the bed.

Your blood is too thin, Katherine. Your pulse is slow.

People shake her hand and say, *Cold hands; warm heart.*

There is no one else here and it is definitely true that sometimes that's sad. Hovering, as it were, on this feeling, she steps outside of herself, looks at the mute image of her, sitting alone, twenty-seven years old, glum, in the middle of Russia.

She writes about the filmmaker dying. She writes her getting into Katherine's water, her big bath back in Petersburg, and opening her wrists, the gesture itself so fiddly and yet so clichéd that her hatred for herself poisons the film. It is hard to look.

...

A woman washed clean. A woman without judgment.

...

"I'd like to speak to Jane."

"Jane Walsh? Jane isn't here anymore. You're calling for NEEDAS?"

Pause.

"I'm afraid NEEDAS is no longer in service. There were cut-backs. This is a referral centre for mental health. Have you been to your GP?"

...

A double row of silver birches, an apple orchard on the left, a clearing. The ground undulates. Meadows and then a wood and then the path forks and there is a sign pointing left: могила Толстого.

A bodily reaction come of tiredness, she thinks, a faint sense of loneliness. Whatever it is, she feels profoundly moved. She follows the path and after a while the overhanging trees thicken and the path is wholly darkened. Birdsong echoes throughout the trees, multiplying, distributing itself. The path muddies. She keeps walking. She walks for a long time, the path disappears, she walks through nettles and dock and comes out in a birch wood, the narrow trunks silver and smooth. The high plumes sway, meet, move apart. She is lost. Mosquitoes bother her skin. The sunlight greys her vision and she staggers, realises she is staggering, puts out a hand, misses and falls to the ground. She stays on her knees for a moment. She looks at the lines in the dirt. She listens to the trees. She turns deliberately on the spot.

This is the way I came, she thinks.

She checks her watch against the time on her phone. Her watch has lost an hour. She winds it on. She heads back into the dim undergrowth. She walks. Finally the path widens again but is soon cut off by some felled trees, their thick trunks chain-sawed into big sections, the ends raw. She steps into a thickly turned field of squat apple trees. Weightless mosquitoes weave threads of noise around her, tugging at the weakness behind her eyes. She comes to some thick grass and lays in it. She sleeps.

She finds the path again, the fork, the sign, and she is back where she started. She feels as though she is walking in exactly the same direction as before but this time she finds the tomb, a raised mound of dirt the size of a coffin with a surrounding fence of low metal arches. There is no plaque. She steps over the fence, kneels by the grave, kisses her fingertips

and touches the cool dirt. She is sweaty, covered in bites, tired, but she tries to feel pious and it's easy enough.

“Lev Nikoleivitch,” she says. “Here lie your bones.”

It is good to say that.

And you, Katherine. Where will they lay your bones?

She strokes her bitten arms, her shirtsleeves rolled to the elbow. Scars. Dirt smells the same the world over. She looks skyward.

Here lie your bones, such a long way from home.

She wonders about the sequences she has written. Suggestive, associative sequences which seem to gather around and circle a truth which cannot be fathomed directly. A mystic. If this is her endeavour then she is right to approach it with clear eyes, with no vocabulary. She laughs to herself. Lev Nikoleivitch.

She steps over the railing, squats by the slope and digs a hole with her hands. The dirt is very soft and cool. She takes Joe's phone from her pocket, the phone she has been texting all this time. She buries it in the dirt and covers it over, then she sits back on her heels and feels the sweat cool and tighten the skin on her face. She wonders if this is a cathartic gesture and realises it is if she wants it to be, that she could certainly write it as such and that this telling of it would be credible. Or she could just have buried the phone and the phone would be buried and if she wanted to write to him again she could write on something else, easing the need the way we eat something when we are hungry.

...

It rains and then it starts to snow. She pulls over. Another little hut with a coffee sign in front, a loo at the back. She parks on the gravel forecourt. A wire fence, a forest beyond. The snow thickens. She faces it and it flurries towards her and the smell of the snow is clean and private, like being home alone and not talking to yourself. She drives into the storm. She leaves her wipers on slow and drives fast. The sat-nav stops her at the end of a potholed lane, grey tower-blocks either side, the purplish balconies smudged on. A man in green overalls sweeps the pavement. A dog hunkers down by a kennel with a corrugated iron roof, his chain coiled beside him. She turns the car off, sits here and lets the snow be around her then she gets out and goes to the dog, shushing his growl as she approaches. It's mangy, a mongrel. She looks where he's looking. Slow traffic, a kids play area with no one in it, a very thin woman poking through the bins with a long stick. She has a feeling that something bad has happened, that this place is dangerous for her. She encourages it, gently stroking the dog's coarse neck.

Driving snow, she thinks. The wipers vainly clearing it. Smothered lights ahead, a dog barking hoarsely. She gets back in the car and drives another two hundred kilometres, back to Veliky Novgorod. She dumps her stuff, has dinner in the empty restaurant and then plays herself at billiards for a while. It is more or less dark by eleven p.m. so she goes out, wet, cold, lost soon enough. She sits by a thin river and cries for a while.

6.

She gets the trains back to Stratford and wanders around Westfields, dazed by the brightness. It is ages before she realises what she's been looking for but she walks right past the restaurants and pubs in a street off the concourse then goes back into the mall and sits in a Burger King with a Diet Coke. The Coke tastes thin and pointless. She watches people dawdle past the open front.

She buys a new pair of Levi's, a t-shirt, a raincoat and a pair of black pumps. There is a bridge to the station and she stops halfway across it and sits on a concrete island. Plate-glass in front of her, a view of the purpling sky. She is full of miles, she feels empty. She heads for the Wetherspoons but her body is stuttering, her legs uncertain, so she gets some cans from Millennium and sleeps for a while in the churchyard's narrow rose garden.

...

She pays for three nights at The City Inn on Mare Street. She orders a gin and tonic from the bar and asks the boy working it how late they stay open.

"Depends," he says.

She looks to the pint of Stella he has stashed by the till. There is a girl on the desk, a cleaner back and forth. The kitchen is closed. Beyond the long glass wall at the back of the room, tall conifers wrapped in tarpaulin breathe in the wind.

...

The room is very neat and clean. She likes it all the same. She empties her satchel onto the bed and looks at the objects she has collected. She puts her old makeup pens and lipstick and some hairpins into the wastepaper basket and pretends she is going to throw

away her notebook and then she puts it back on the bed. There's a full bundle of cash left and a few loose notes and she puts them on the dresser with a handful of change and the plane ticket and then she lines her cans up under the window and places the knives in a row in front. Dennis' paring knife, the bent razorblade skimmed with blood, the breadknife the woman pushed into her partner's throat, the craft-knife she pulled across Bob's head. She looks at the weapons and moves them around, reordering them, re-orientating herself, feeling as though she is purposefully moving shapes in her mind, though unsure of the design she is uncertainly moving towards.

She looks through her notes. There is a brief description of the hotel, Macready's, transposed to Budapest, some dialogue, a sketch of the yard: *There's an expanse of waste ground out back...*

This is how you end up in hospital, she thinks.

By making a plan and then deferring recognition of the whole, performing the next action in isolation, without context, pretending to be oblivious of what it all adds up to.

And what does it all add up to?

She holds the breadknife. She puts the blade against her forearm but it isn't that, she has no interest in hurting herself.

She throws the notebook in the bin and runs a bath. She sets a can on the edge, slowly lowers herself and closes her eyes. Her pale veins stand clear on her thighs and then shimmer free. She scoops them up. They are white and slippery, like rice noodles. They slip through her fingers and eel back to the water and she wakes up, surrounded by the steam swirling about beneath the spotlights.

...

She puts on her new clothes. She stuffs her old things into the Levi bag. She uses some of the makeup, scrubs her hair dry then brushes it and looks at herself in the mirror, arms dangling.

She puts the full grand and the plane ticket back into her satchel then spreads the last eight scores across the desk-dresser. She stares at them for a minute or so, starts totting up her expenses, loses count, pockets the money, shoulders up her satchel and takes the bag with her to the lobby. She has a glass of white wine at the bar. The bar boy watches a gameshow on the corner TV and she smiles at him but when he looks at her she looks away and it makes her laugh. She stares at the swelling conifers beyond the glass.

...

She was at Lifeline on Mare Street. She would sit on the concrete steps by the fire escape, next to the bins, drinking a can before another tiring meeting with Sheridan, her care manager. Before Lifeline there were other Drug and Alcohol Services, other care managers, mother figures, all of them. She is like a confused duckling, nodding her head and holding her own hands, wishing she could curl up on the lap of whichever woman happens to be sitting across from her.

She heads towards Hackney Central. A cab draws up in front of the church across the road and she watches Dennis get out. He leans in to the window, pays the driver and touches fists with the figure on the back seat. He looks up, sees Katherine and leans back towards the cab but it's already pulling out and he stands straight and hitches his jeans. His lower jaw is bluish. There is a black line on his bald head. She steps out into traffic, holds up a hand and he looks up and down the road, readying himself to take flight. Some church kids stand on the pavement rapping about Jesus. He watches them and then looks towards her. He stands his ground. He holds her eyes.

“Hi,” she says.

He kisses his teeth and circles a palm over the zig-zag scar on his head. She is smiling and he cannot help it because she is pleased and he smiles too. The guilt slackens. The kids beside them seem happy. She holds a finger up to the boy – wait – and squashes the Levi bag into the bin beside them. Some late daffs nod above the wall of the churchyard. She fingers the thin yellow petals. The hour gongs from the bell-tower.

“I got people looking for you,” he says.

“Have you?”

Pause.

“No,” he says. “Not really.”

He talks with the corner of his mouth and his eyes show that it hurts. “I guess I had it coming.”

“It doesn’t really matter,” she says.

He shrugs.

She pulls her satchel round and takes out the money, holding back a few notes from the top. She puts the rest at his chest and he closes his hands over it.

“What’s this?”

“I need you to hold it for me.”

“You broke my jaw.”

He splits the money and puts half in each pocket of his hoody.

“I’ll meet you in the bar across the road,” she says. “Ten o’ clock tomorrow night.”

“I’ll be there, will I?”

She passes him the plane ticket.

“If I don’t show up, put it in an envelope and leave it with the bar boy. My name’s Katherine.”

“Katherine.”

He bobs his head and turns the ticket over in his hands.

“Katherine Goss,” he says.

“That’s right.”

“And you’re going to Russia.”

“Yes,” she says. “I’m going to Russia.”

7.

She leans against the railings and sips from a Ribena bottle watching the tight pleats on the river.

She walks along the concourse to the last halls of residence. She looks up at the kitchen windows and pretends that she is looking at the window of her own floor but she is no longer sure which one it was. The concourse ends at a bridge and she sits under it, her feet over the side.

She takes out her phone and strokes her thumb over the numbers. She feels okay. After a while she checks the time again. She sprays herself with a pocket deodorant, finishes her drink and sets the bottle beside her. She drops her phone in the water.

...

A man stands at the driver's door of a silver Ford Focus. His hand is cold.

"Katherine," he says.

"Hello."

"I'm DC Cole."

She nods.

He opens the back door for her. Cole's partner turns in his seat. He is younger, with watery blue eyes, a complexion like white fish defrosting. A boneless handshake.

"Davis."

Before he starts the car Cole turns in his seat. He arrests her on suspicion of GBH with intent then he asks if she understands what he's just told her and she says that she does

and because he has said this something has changed. He tells her they're driving her to Brentwood.

"Do you understand why we've picked you up, Katherine?"

She finds his eyes in the mirror and makes her own say nothing at all, which isn't hard.

"Your name has come forward in relation to an attack we're investigating that took place on the night of August 19th. For the sake of thoroughness..."

She fiddles with the electric window but the window stays up.

"Do you want that open, Katherine?"

She nods at him and the window comes down a little and cold blue air runs in.

Occasionally Davis looks at her in the mirror and eventually he says, "Have you had a drink today, Katherine?"

"Yes."

"But you're not drunk?"

"No."

...

She's taken to the desk where the sergeant counts and bags her cash.

"No wallet?" he says. "No phone?"

She shakes her head. The desk sergeant asks if she'd like a solicitor.

"No," she says.

“Any scars? Tattoos? And how tall are you, Katherine?”

Cole and Davis lead her round to an interview room. There is a table with a black top covered in scratches, a tape recorder in the middle. She sits with her back to the door. They sit opposite.

...

“As we’ve explained to you, Katherine, your name has been put forward in relation to an attack we’re investigating that took place on the night of the 19th of August. And we arrested you in the car on suspicion of GBH with intent and robbery, didn’t we?”

“Yes.”

“And do you understand what we told you then? That you don’t have to say anything now but it may harm your defence if you don’t mention during questioning something you may later rely on?”

“Yes. I understand that.”

...

“Where are you staying?”

“I’m staying in London at the moment. I’m back and forth.”

“So when you’re not in London, you’re at your dad’s.”

“Yes.”

“But you weren’t at your dad’s that night? That is, the night of August 19th into August 20th.”

“I was. I was staying in the caravan. In his garden. I’d been back a while.”

“Okay. I thought you’d said you were in London. And where are you now?”

“Brentwood.”

“Where did you spend the night?”

“A Travelodge.”

“You’re working?”

“No.”

“You’re staying in a Travelodge. That’s the one on Mare Street, in Hackney. Is it expensive?”

She shrugs.

“I suppose what I’m asking is what you’re doing for money.”

“I left my job at the pub a couple of months ago. I got my holiday back as pay. I’ve been living off that.”

“Okay. And on the night in question, August 19th, you were in Harwich.”

“Yes.”

“What were you doing?”

“I don’t know. I assume I was doing what I usually do.”

“And you’ve never been to Cypress Road, Katherine?”

“Not knowingly.”

“But you’ve never been into that house, into number nine, Cypress Road?”

“No.”

“And you came back to London the day after.”

“I came back to London a few days ago. Monday.”

“You know Lee and Matt. You know Joe.”

“Yes.”

“Katherine, can I say at this point that if it is the case that you do know what happened that night, that perhaps you went to that house and weren’t yourself involved in the attack but that you do know what happened, that now would be the time to tell us that.”

Pause.

“I was at my dad’s.”

“Have you ever used a hammer, Katherine?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry, no, it wasn’t a hammer, it was an axe. Have you ever used an axe?”

Pause.

“No. I’ve never used an axe.”

...

Cole’s voice stays even and Katherine’s voice stays even and calm. Davis listens, his fingers interlocked, his shoulders forward. He rarely looks at her. She begins to enjoy the exchange, metronomic, precise, civil. The questions come from Cole, patient and repetitive. She likes him. She rests comfortably in the cradling buzz of the vodka.

She doesn't mention the hospital or NEEDAS and they don't seem too interested in what she's been up to. They ask why she left her job and she says, "I was tired of pub work," and they leave it at that.

"Okay, Katherine. We're going to pause the interview there and one of my colleagues is going to take your photo and get a quick copy of your fingerprints and then we'll come back here and wrap this up. Is that okay with you?"

"Yes."

"And are you happy, Katherine, that you have responded truthfully to the questions I've asked you today?"

"Yes."

"Are you lying to me?"

"No."

"Have you lied to me at any point during this interview?"

"No."

...

A woman rolls her prints on a flat glass sheet in a scanner then turns her round on the stool and takes her photo.

She's put in a cell. She pees on the small toilet, uses the scratchy tracing-paper toilet roll beside it and sits on the crash-mat, the bed-base built into the back wall. There is a small window behind her, the thick glass frosted, a wire mesh sandwiched inside opaque glass. A white light above the door emits a low buzz.

She closes her eyes and keeps her thoughts empty.

...

“The scene we found at Cypress Road, Katherine, was horrific. Quite frankly it was like something out of a horror film, blood all over the place. As part of our investigation a very thorough forensic examination took place. Now we’ve just taken a copy of your fingerprints and I can tell you that your prints match exactly a copy of a fingerprint we lifted from that scene. You were there, Katherine, and you do know what happened. You can keep telling me that you weren’t there but you won’t be very successful. So why don’t you tell me what happened.”

“I’d like to see a solicitor.”

...

They take her to the front desk. She’s charged. They lead her back to the cell.

...

She is taken to a small empty room without windows. A young blonde woman comes in and waits for the door to close behind her before she puts out her hand. Katherine shakes her fingers. The woman shifts the files in the crook of her arm and says, “You alright without somewhere to sit? Could have given us somewhere to sit down.”

She gives Katherine her card. Jeneanne Gamble, Ilford.

Katherine leans against the wall with her arms folded. The woman puts her files on the floor.

“Right, Katherine. First off, do you understand the charge?”

She nods tightly.

“Good. I have a feeling that this will be prosecuted as a joint enterprise. Do you know what that means?”

“No.”

“It means it doesn’t matter who did what. If the prosecution can prove you were there when the attack took place then it doesn’t matter what you did or didn’t do. Basically, it means you have to be very careful about what you say to the police from now on.”

“They have my print.”

“Which is why I’d advise you to answer no comment to the rest of the interview. Do you have previous?”

“A couple of drink driving. Possession.”

“Cannabis?”

“Cocaine.”

“No violence?”

“No convictions.”

“Good.”

“Will they keep me?”

“They could bail you until they can get you in front of a court, probably tomorrow morning. In my experience though, they won’t. The decision rests with the desk sergeant and the desk sergeant will usually keep people in, because he can.”

Katherine presses her fingertips against her eyes then takes them away.

“This is a problem,” she says.

“Let me get us somewhere where we can actually sit down and have a proper chat.”

“I’m going to need a drink, Jeneanne. Or some Valium. Something.”

Jeneanne pauses, takes a long look at her and cocks her head.

“Are you dependent, Katherine?”

She nods.

“Are you in a treatment programme?”

“Yes.”

“Booze or both?”

“Booze.”

“Okay. Let’s get that seen to first. We’ll get you checked over and they can administer some meds, some Librium or something. And then we can finish the interview. Are you okay for now, for the next half hour or so?”

“Yes.”

...

She holds either side of the plastic chair and tries to breathe evenly. The doctor kneels in front of her. She is trying not to exaggerate anything and in doing so she exaggerates the nervousness and her lip quivers. She smudges tears from her eyes.

“Okay,” he says. He nods his head, turns to the policewoman and says, “How long is she here?”

The woman shrugs and looks blankly at Katherine.

“Librium alright?”

“Diazepam?”

The doctor shakes his head.

She is given pills and taken back to her cell. She sits on the crash-matt, legs crossed, eyes closed, willing the pills to melt through her bloodstream. The buzzing of the electric light puts mittened hands around her. There is a watery sense of panic in the background and she tries to keep away from it, to stay inside the meds.

...

We point a camera and sit on the bay. The open notebook, a crossed window. She directs the body back to life in order to demonstrate where it died.

...

She no comments the rest of the interview and then she and Jeneanne are given a room with chairs and a table.

“If there was a girl there,” says Katherine, “surely he would have said.”

“We don’t know that he won’t.”

Jeneanne sits back. She twists the thin wedding ring on her finger.

“I should have full disclosure on your arrest, but they’re being difficult. Whoever has put your name forward clearly wasn’t there. It’s hearsay, which is inadmissible in court. If it weren’t for this print they’d have to let you go. And the robbery charge doesn’t make sense.”

“Did they recover anything?”

“Not that I’m aware of. You’re staying in a B&B?”

“For now.”

“Did they search it?”

“I don’t think so. They asked where I wanted to meet and picked me up from there.”

“Okay.”

She sits forward. She clicks the end of her pen.

“We need a statement. Not right now, if you don’t feel like it, but we’ll need a statement. We can’t just say you weren’t there. Well, we can, but it won’t do you any favours.”

Pause.

“Can we do this another time?”

8.

Her things are piled in the hallway. Someone has changed the lock on her front door. She knocks for her neighbour to say goodbye but no one comes. She leans her head against the door and hears or imagines she can hear the blind woman's laboured breathing.

She digs out her manuscript, takes a few other things, tidies the rest and writes a note for the woman.

...

The Indian guy is sitting on the couch, hands between his knees, head bowed.

"It's you," he says.

"Yes. It's me."

She sits beside him. The lobby is empty. Kindness comes from him. She puts the manuscript in his lap.

"This is for me?"

"Yes," she says.

"Thank you."

He reads the last page. "Your friend was here," he says.

Pause.

"He said Katherine Goss used to stay here. I suppose he was looking for you."

He puts a finger below his left eye then he touches the knuckles on his right hand, miming a line from her book, a description of Tommy, his wonky left eye, fingers scarred up.

She nods.

She thinks of Tanya for the first time in a while. Thinking of Tanya reminds her of Magda. Because she wrote a letter once, to Tanya, and she woke up in hospital and Tanya was there and she felt love angle through her, like the white trapezoid of light across the gallery floor, like Magda gently flapping the front of her shirt and standing before the windows with a can of cold lemonade.

She walks to the arched doorway and pauses in the breakfast room. He must set the tables the night before, or perhaps immediately after the breakfast. She imagines the man doing this, alone, in silence. White paper clothes, the tables forming two parallel rows. The mismatching chairs, the carpet curling up by the skirting board. The grubby windows. She wonders for a moment why she prefers places like this, and all the places like this are there in this place, in this empty breakfast room. A sense of history presses against her.

He shows her to her room and lingers in the doorway while she fingers the lampshade, opens and closes the drawer, feeling very much as though she is being directed, as though these are the gestures one performs when returning to a familiar hotel room.

Gestures of return. A pleasing phrase.

“You might need this,” he says, and she takes the manuscript from him.

When he leaves she is alone. She turns on the television. She turns it off again. She shifts up the window and looks out at the dim patch of wasteground, a powdery white moon high and luminous. She puts one leg out the window, straddles the sill, then she climbs out entirely, is standing free of the frame that kept her point of view familiar. She is standing in a spot she has never stood in before. There was a tricycle against the wall. The moon is white.

She walks to the edge of the concrete, up to the grass. She nods her head side to side. She sings.

...

She knows the road. A line of old terraced houses, boarded windows, the gardens high with rubbish, weeds, hectic buddleias. Perhaps she is here out of love for him, to save him, compelled by memories of their intimacy. Perhaps she is here to follow him down to wherever he is going, suddenly overwhelmed by the weight of it all. She will decide later on and whatever happens next will no doubt encourage her decision one way or the other. Or she could just be here, which she is.

The orange brick building at the end of the row has a turret at one end, the rounded bay windows covered with steel sheets. She walks round back. Shit lines the pathway. A couple of gutted mopeds in the back garden, a mattress, some split bin-bags.

A man sits on the back step in a pair of wellies. The blood-coloured linoleum in the kitchen behind him is glossy with water, flooded.

“Hello,” he says, and moves the cigarette away from his face, one eye closed, squinting.

“I know you,” she says.

“Aye,” he says. “That’s probable.”

“You were in the room.”

“Aye,” he says again.

“Cheers,” she says. The man with the toast. The breakfast room. Murky oil paintings against the wall. She steps past him. There are holes in her boots. The front room is packed,

thick with smoke, people gauging out on the couches. She takes the stairs. The carpet is squidgy, the whole place is flooded. There is a bedroom stripped of everything but a mattress and on it a woman lays sprawled, snoring loudly. Katherine slips off the woman's flats, takes the smouldering cigarette from the ashtray and stubs it out. She tries to shift up the window. The jamb is swollen.

When she comes back out front Tom is walking towards her and she raises a hand, hi. He lifts a hand too, drops it, turns away from her then turns back. They stand still some distance apart. A young boy sits on the wall opposite knocking his heels. He raises a hand to her and she nods hello. The street's quiet, as though abandoned, and the light – blue, deepening – makes the stillness very peaceful. A broken streetlight dangles heavily from its cord.

“Tommy,” she says.

He bites his teeth and spits on the floor. She doesn't move. She just says his name again and he shakes his head and walks towards her and she sees another guy over his shoulder, coming round the corner, walking quickly towards them. She nods behind him, Tom turns, stops, turns back to her and, close to her now, he says, “I was gonna kill him.”

“Yes,” she says.

“Then I thought of you.”

Pause.

“He's gonna do me, Katherine. And you're gonna let him.”

“Yes,” she says, and they watch Asra approach, watch him put a hand in the side of his dirty green coat, and as he withdraws his hand Tom steps to him and the two men

embrace with a hard cuffing sound. She backs up. The young boy jumps off the wall and runs very quickly away from them.

Asra takes a step back and Tom turns to her with both hands at his chest. She settles love over him, sparingly. He spits bloody and says her name then his sightline drops, he is on his knees and she is still backing up, saying to herself, “No.” Saying, “I can’t. I’m unable to.”

Asra raises a bloody hand like a stop sign. Tom falls forward. Her thoughts blank out. Asra calmly walks past them and sits on the kerb. She kneels. She surrounds Tommy with her hands as he lowers himself onto his side and draws his knees up, contracting towards the centre of his trauma. She is saying his name and then she stands and walks to the kerb. Asra holds the knife up for her without looking round. She takes it from him. He says something she doesn’t hear and she walks into the road, stands over him and pushes the tip of the blade into his afro. He moves his head, eyes closed, smiling, as though he is being stroked.

She looks back at the knife, realises what it is and flings it away from herself. It clatters into the street. She turns Tommy onto his back, presses his chest with one palm and leans on it with the other, performing these gestures very calmly, as though watching them in a film with the sound turned off.

“An ambulance,” she says. “Call an ambulance.”

It is impossibly quiet and nothing is happening. His eyes are open but he is not looking at her. She stays like this, feeling the blood soak her knees, the smooth racing of her indecipherable thoughts. She stands.

“He was gonna kill me,” says Asra.

“It doesn’t matter,” she says. “You should go.”

He stands. They are facing each other then he shrugs and she walks back the way she came. The streetlamps came on, it's getting dark, and the light is caught in spirals among the bare branches of the trees.

9.

Her wrists are cuffed in front and the desk sergeant leads her to the doors. A Serca van idles at the end of the drive. The driver gets out and fits a second cuff to K.'s left wrist, chaining her to himself for the few paces it takes them to reach the van. He opens a narrow side door. There is a cubicle at the back of the van with a hard plastic seat. He sits her down, uncuffs her from himself and closes the reinforced steel door. Graffiti scratched into the bright zinc panelling and the word *Partisan* scored on the window in Cyrillic.

They drive into Colchester along the Avenue of Remembrance. She has walked this road many times. They plant daffs along here in the spring.

...

She is left in the court's holding cell. Magnolia walls, a wide-barred front. Someone's left behind yesterday's paper. She turns the pages and smells herself and closes the paper and waits. Footsteps echo. An officer of the courts unlocks the heavy door and her barrister, a pretty Asian woman with neat teeth, opens it wide and motions her out. She explains the bail application as she leads Katherine up a wide stone staircase and then Katherine is shown to the dock where she stands behind plexi-glass, hears a preamble and then has her conditional bail set as her barrister told her it would be.

...

She is given her money at the front desk. Her knees liquefy and she steadies herself against the desk and wipes a ball-point pen across some paperwork. She tersely thanks the man and half-listens to her barrister, feeling light and relieved. It is a nice building, grand and spacious. It smells of cold white paint. Her barrister tells her that her solicitor will be in touch.

She steps out of the side doors putting her belt on. A skinny young lad in dazzling Reeboks sucks on a cigarette. Katherine fits her belt through the loopholes and smiles to the boy who smiles back.

...

She pauses outside Spar then turns on her heels and walks down Herrick Street. She feels okay. She checks the clock-tower and marvels at the fact that she hasn't had a drink for sixteen hours.

Paul is on the front steps eating a piece of fruit cake from his palm. He has two black eyes. He asks Katherine for a pound and she gives him one.

...

She asks to see Jane and takes a seat. The waiting room is small with four seats against the wall and a busy mosaic on the noticeboard, stuff about diseases and needles and AA. She sits beside Sonia, one of the girls from the pre-detox groups. They exchange nods and Sonia's smile is slow-blinked and pissed and her bottom lip pouts out as she speaks. It reminds K. of her mother, that look, the flushed cheeks and too-long blinks, the thick soft voice, "Hi, Kaffrin."

"Hello."

She closes her eyes and hears the messy clapple of the water fountain. Sulphur from a struck match, the click-burst of a cold can, the overcast sky smothering weak sunshine. She thinks about Bob and would rather it hadn't happened. It is shame that this is not enough. People need the symmetry.

Jane.

Katherine stands, smiling, forgetting for a moment why she is here, just pleased and surprised to see Jane with her clean grey hair and sturdy thighs. They go through to an interview room.

...

“You got our letter.”

“No. I didn’t.”

“We sent you an appointment. For the detox.”

Pause.

“And we’ve found you a rehab placement. If you want to go. It’s in Kent. It’s for twelve weeks, initially, but if you need an extension we can approach the funders for that.”

Pause.

“What’s wrong? Nervous?”

“I’ve been arrested. And charged. I’m on bail.”

“Ah.”

Jane takes her hands from her knee and sits back. There is room for humour here and Jane smiles with the corner of her mouth and Katherine smiles too. It is funny how comprehensively one can fuck up, without even really trying.

“I have to sign in at a police station every day.”

“There are ways round it. We’ll find a way.”

“If I’m going to prison then what is the point?”

“It’s not certain, is it? It’s not certain you’re going to prison.”

She won’t be able to drink in prison. The idea does not fit in her head, it just isn’t conceivable, and because it isn’t conceivable it cannot happen. Relieved, she says, “No, it won’t come to that. So I should go, I suppose. To the detox.”

“We’ve had people on bail go through detox before, I’m sure we have. You’ll have to talk to your solicitor about adjusting your bail conditions.”

“What’s the date?”

“When?”

“The date that I go.”

“September 9th. Next Monday.”

“Okay.”

Something shifts. They’re quiet. Jane’s expression changes.

She hoped I’d get better. She believed it was possible and now she doesn’t.

“Thank you for all your help, Jane.”

Katherine sits forward. Jane cocks her head. She looks at Katherine very frankly, openly conveying, You won’t get it and you’re still lost and that’s a shame.

“How’s your health?”

“I’m sick a lot. In the mornings. The dry heaves. Sometimes I bring up blood. It’s hard to drink off the shakes entirely. By the time I have I’m usually too drunk to function properly. My hip hurts. I’ve had this strange emptiness in my thighs. The other morning I couldn’t walk. My limbs often feel strange. My body just fails. I get acid reflux so bad I can’t

sleep. My fingertips are numb. My period comes on randomly, maybe half a dozen times a year. There's a dull pain in my kidneys."

What else? Nothing.

She shrugs and Jane says, "Yes."

"What's that, do you think? With my legs?"

"It could be peripheral neuropathy. Nerve damage. That's quite common. The pain in your hip could be a number of things. It could be osteoporosis or arthritis. Or it could just be a pain in your hip. As for the vomiting in the mornings, the dry heaves, that's normal. The blood is where the vessels in your oesophagus break. Numb extremities, kidney pain, acid reflux... That's what it does. Do you have blackouts?"

"Where I can't remember?"

"Yes, a bit like that. Sometimes people in black out just sort of... come to, and they can't remember how they got there."

"Yes, I get that."

Perhaps that's what it was. She can feel the weight of the hatchet in her hand and she jolts, the room wobbles, something skitters at the periphery.

"What about hallucinations, or voices in your head. Anything like that?"

"No."

"Fits?"

She shakes her head. They're quiet for a bit.

Katherine stands, puts out her hand, takes Jane's warm fingers and nods and says again, "Thank you."

...

She opens a can, unwraps a pack of cigarettes and lights one with a match. The bench is damp. Rooks caw. The town hall clock tower hammers the hour- eleven- onto the pewter sky. The messy spill of the water feature. The shrubs dip and nod.

...

She walks to Debenhams and steals some pants, buys a bottle of deodorant from Boots and sits in a toilet cubicle on Eld Lane.

The distance is hard to puncture. She is just sitting on the toilet looking at her hands. Her fingers start to stroke themselves or she notices that her fingers are stroking themselves and she assumes she decided to do that, a small gesture of comfort, an affectation. She whines, clenches her teeth and whispers to herself, "Sorry, Jane."

She shakes her head. She flushes, changes her pants, tucks the old pair behind the loo, washes her face and leaves.

...

She sits in The Castle with a drink and a plate of ham and eggs. She eats a slice of ham, thinking of her father, sipping a glass of fruit cider. The restlessness dissipates. She thinks with a pleasant, widening sense of impersonal excitement, I wonder how this ends.

10.

A girl at the bar gives her the money. It's in an envelope marked, *K. Goss, minus expenses*, a phone number underneath.

She sits in the breakfast room with a glass of white wine. Someone's hoovering the carpet. The news is showing on the corner TV. The bar girls watches it, elbows on the bar, the only other patron a middle-aged blonde woman in a fitted suit looking at Katherine now and again over a laptop. The woman sips her drink and Katherine says, "Some company?"

She shakes her head.

She thinks about calling the boy, Dennis, about trying this out. She could reveal things to him, share stories about her past and, in sharing them, feel a sense of ownership of these stories in such an uncomplicated way that intimacy would soak carefully between them. There was an accident, she might say. I was blind. And he would open his hands and put them out to her. They would be close then, and she would realise how remarkable their closeness would be for how inappropriate or unlikely it would seem that they would find one another in this way. He was going to hurt her and now – look – they are friends, lovers even.

She drinks a gin and tonic and then another, thinking about these things.

You are like a bird, Katherine. Confused by a bright scrap of paper, you commence a ritual dance, oblivious to the fact that you are dancing alone.

She is drunk soon enough. She watches the subtitle scroll along the bottom of the TV screen, annotating the news, and she feels or imagines that it – the subtitle – is doing all of this for her, telling the necessary but unimportant stories so that a closeness can be born and she feels very tender and very close to the boy standing at the bar, to the girl moving the heavy armchairs around so she can vacuum underneath, she feels very tender towards the

people in her head, an unspecific slew of them, colourful, manipulated by her hand as she slowly turns the glass. She drinks more and the feeling moves away from her, turns into something else, and she is watching it, watching herself, and she takes three bottles of white wine back to the room and drinks until she vomits. She throws a bottle against the wall. It bounces off and lands on the bed and she tosses it underarm into the bathroom where it bursts and scatters across the tiles. She steps down into the room and fumbles up a piece of glass. She saws off a tail of her hair and tosses it skittering across the floor and then she sits cross-legged amidst the broken glass and looks at her bloody hands.

She takes off her clothes, lets the bath run and sits on the edge of the bed listening to the water. The room stays still, the world carries on and her stillness feels remarkable. She hums inside it. She feels as though to move would be to make a statement she is not ready to accept. That she is a part of the world. The way to defuse the monumentality of this feeling is to forget it but she doesn't want to, she wants to sit with it for the moment. She tries to remember what has happened, what she has done. She has been Katherine all along. That's about as clear an answer she can give herself and it doesn't mean very much.

..

The phone cord doesn't reach the bath so she lies on the bed with the phone on her belly.

"You're angry at me. That's why you took me round there."

He sighs. "Where's the money?"

"I buried it."

"Where?"

“In a field. In Sussex, I think.”

“That’s helpful.”

“Yes... They’ve got my print.”

“I know. I heard. I’m going to see Kyle.”

“Why?”

“To find out what he’s said to the police.”

“It doesn’t matter what he’s said.”

“I’m going to see him.”

“When?”

“Tonight.”

“You should be careful, Joe. It is not just about this. For Kyle, it is about something else.”

11.

The shadow of a deity passes over the water.

...

She packs her bag and leaves it on the bed. She goes through to the breakfast room but it's too early, there's no one here. She puts the kettle on in the small kitchen, finds a big bag of loose tea under the sink, puts some in a chipped blue mug and pours some boiling water over it. She stands at the windows, her hands around the warm mug. There's no one on the desk. She wanders the corridors, looking at her bare feet, the blank doors with their neat brass numbers.

She sits in the yard for a while. She turns her phone on. Nothing comes so she turns it off and leaves it on the wasteground at her hip. Some rubbish scattered about.

She takes her bankcard from her wallet, tosses the wallet on the bed and leaves her stuff here. There's nothing much in the bag anyway. She gets a bus to Hackney Central, walks to Shoreditch, on to Liverpool Street. It's a fast train, stopping only at Chelmsford and Colchester and then she changes at Manningtree and stands a while on the platform looking at the fields. She was at school in this town. She tries to remember it and does remember it, a feeling, a quietness, something like peace. And she realises she is peaceful, she is okay. She buys a croissant and a coffee and the train comes in. The smell of the Maltings, the shallow glassy spread of the estuary between the trees and then the oil refinery and she is at Harwich International, a fading port, and then at Dovercourt, back where she was born.

She walks slowly up the High Street then down to the sea front. The tide is a long way out. She walks on the sand. She throws some stones.

...

There is a crowd on the driveway of Greenacres and an ambulance parked on the drive, up by the clubhouse. She walks through the crowd. A bunch of kids are standing at the gates in front of the ambulance, scooters lopsided on the ground, balls stilled at their feet, watching the crowd of older people through which she has just moved. She walks onto the lawn and looks through the windows, into the bar, and sees two paramedics inside. The glass is obscured by its reflection of the bright day out here, her there in the glass, stark clouds behind her, black and limned with the yellow glow of sunshine. She walks the length of the drive. Sunlight blinds the front windows of the caravans. She comes to the padlocked gate and tries to recall the number. Nothing comes. She relaxes the effort and the number arrives at her fingers. She is turning the padlock when her knees give, she wobbles and lets herself drop to the ground. The grass is wet. Her vision staggers. Her hands start trembling and she looks at them. A profound feeling of sadness goes through her and she realises it is for herself, realises that she is, for a moment, very sorry for herself. She is crying. She looks at the sky. She mouths a prayer, nonsense, a directionless spike of faith that comes out of her as a whine.

She walks back the way she came. The ambulance door slams to. She stands between two little girls and, without looking at her, one of them holds Katherine's hand and Katherine looks at the glossy crown of her white-blond hair. The driver moves back round the front and speaks to Len, who is standing at the side door with a bottle of Coke between his fingers. Len points her out. The paramedic nods, walks to her, puts out his hand. She nods beside herself, gesturing to the man that she cannot, that she is holding this little girl's hand.

"You're Katherine?"

"Yes," she says. "I am."

"Would you like to come along with us?"

“No,” she says.

Pause. The man nods. Len steps over to her, flexes his dentures, thumbs one watery eye. He puts a hand at his paunch then puts it out to her and rests it on her shoulder. She lets go of the girl’s hand and turns on the spot. She makes herself move. Her vision is split into kaleidoscopic segments, grey, translucent, needles of light extending and retracting. She is in shock. Her body is in shock. Her heartbeat escalates. She stops walking and puts a hand at her chest. This is a gesture one makes when one’s heart is beating erratically. She drops her hand. It raises itself despite her, determined to perform the gesture which connotes: *My heart*. She is either not listening or no one is talking to her. She walks off the path and rests between two caravans. It is darker here. A narrow band of dirt, a wastepipe at her thigh dribbling violet water. She wrists her eyes. She breathes deeply. She stays here until her knees ache and then she heads back to the clubhouse. It’s open. Two of the children are sliding the white ball along the pool table, the colours filling the glass eyebrows of the display. There’s no one on the bar. A patch of dried vomit in the middle of the floor.

Kyle touches her shoulder. She turns to him. They embrace. She can feel his bones and he can feel hers.

...

“We’d been staying at the house together,” he says. “She was off it. Six days, something like that.”

He turns the glass of lemonade between his thighs, his eyes low. He looks very sweet, like a little boy. She wants to touch his knee and so she does.

“I came down this morning and she wasn’t there. She comes over here to do the cleaning, couple of quid. Len helps her out. I don’t know why I came over. I just did. Found the bar doors unlocked. She’s unconscious on the floor, just laying there. Vomit all around.”

Katherine’s jaw clenches and whatever nearly comes at that – vomit all around – retreats, she bites it off. She did not see her on the stretcher, she is sure of that, yet at the same time she has a very clear image of her lying there and she realises the picture she carries of her mother in her mind is similar to or somehow synonymous with the feeling of that other image, of her lying dead or dying on a stretcher. She realises how straightforward this is and imagines herself telling the story in a meeting.

My name is Katherine, she’d say. And I’m an alcoholic.

Hi, Katherine.

I went to see my mother. She’d gone to do some cleaning in a pub down the road. She’d been sober a few days and then, like that, she helped herself to the top shelf and drank until she passed out on the floor. She choked on her vomit. My friend found her there a few hours later.

“I pressed charges,” he says.

She nods.

“I suppose the police are looking for you.”

“Yes,” she says. “They came to the flat. My neighbour moved me out.”

Kyle nods and something occurs to her, something that is very pleasing to say. “She is very moral,” says Katherine.

“Who?”

“My neighbour. She is blind and she is very moral. And she saw me with a machete. Someone broke into my house and I fixed the lock and then the police came round and it was too much for her. I am not the sort of person she wants living above her.”

...

He cooks some eggs and they sit at the kitchen table together. They don't eat. The day pales, fades. He walks into the front room and touches the photo of her and Joe on the gas fire.

...

It is very late by the time she heads up Romford Road. She's tired. She sees a blue light turning above the roofs of the parked cars, walks towards it until she can see two more police cars parked on the forecourt, three officers standing by the front doors talking to someone in the lobby. She looks at the ground. She feels a swift wave of elation. She walks towards the cars, thinking of the Bronze Horseman, thinking of a man standing silhouetted against the greying sky. She takes the manuscript from her bag, crosses the road, sits on the wall in front of the mosque and puts the papers beside her, then she walks back the way she came, to the Langthorne, the streets empty, the sky black, the windows dark.

12.

She sits on the edge of the bath finishing last night's wine. It is warm and awful. She uses her fingers to be sick, reopening the harsh slit on her knuckle. She holds her fingers crooked before her. The cuts sting.

She has another bath and washes her hair and sits wrapped in a towel. She tries the room's phone but it's been locked again so she goes down to the desk in her bath towel. The girl on reception unlocks her phone and asks Katherine if she'd like a plaster. Katherine looks at her fingers and the girl touches her own cheek. K. mimics the gesture. Her fingertip comes away bloody.

The girl comes round from behind the desk. She puts a plaster on her cheek and then she touches the back of Katherine's head, loosening the hair there and Katherine steps back and smiles.

The shutters are down over the optics and it's not yet six a.m. but she says to the girl, "Any chance of a drink?" and the girl nods a few times and says, "Sure. Okay."

She fixes her a vodka tonic but there's no ice and Katherine goes back up to the room and calls her dad.

"I'm sorry I didn't call sooner."

"It's early, Katherine."

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

Pause.

“Are you going to be okay?”

She sees herself as he might, briefly, and holding that perspective begins to ache. She moves, the perspective shimmers and she is herself. She sips her drink. She says, “I’m coming back this morning. Everything’s going to be okay.”

She makes her bed very neatly, flattening the counterpane, fluffing the pillows. She puts most of the broken glass and hair into the bin. Her haircut isn’t that bad. She gathers it into a tight ponytail and wishes she had some clean clothes.

...

The ticket guy comes round as the train nears Romford. He scribbles on her ticket.

“You know we’re not going all the way. Last stop Harwich International. Town stations are closed.”

“Why?”

He shrugs.

The carriage is empty. It’s a new train, clean and empty. She watches the arcing cables beyond the window and tries not to think about anything and then she walks up to the refreshments carriage. There is a young girl with jet black hair arranging crisps in a basket. She thinks of asking the girl why the stations are closed and the girl smiles and touches the badge on her breast. Katherine asks for some cans and the girl puts them in a brown paper bag with handles and K. takes them back to her seat.

...

She gets off at Manningtree. There is a new car park beside the platform but otherwise the place is as it was. On the other side there are fields, a line of trees, the blue sky. It is a

nice day. The station bar is closed. There is a seating area beside it and the line into Harwich butts up against it. The Harwich trains pull into the platform and wait and they have nowhere to go but back the way they came. A train sits there now, grounded, the driver standing on the platform smoking a cigarette.

She sits at one of the tables and sips her last can. She feels like writing and is glad she threw the notebook away. The Norwich train unloads and slides off and a young girl in a fur coat drags a suitcase in and props it by Katherine's table. She asks for a lighter, lights a cigarette and makes a phone call.

"The station's closed... The police have closed it off, found someone on the tracks, apparently. Stabbed, a machete in his head. What I've heard, anyway."

The woman talks some more and then hangs up. She splays her fingers and blows smoke at them then she flicks her butt and sits opposite Katherine. Katherine's beer has finished. There isn't an off licence for a couple of miles, there wasn't anyway, but trains to and from wherever slide in and out quite frequently with their refreshment carriages, their brown paper bags. It's okay, she can sit here a while longer.

They sit in silence for a bit and then the girl says, "Pain, hey."

"Yes."

"Trying to get to Harwich?"

Katherine nods.

"My dad's there," says the girl.

"Mine too."

"It's his birthday."

Katherine smiles.

“I suppose I’ll get a cab. You want to share?”

“No. I think I’m going to leave it.”

“Sure?”

“Yes,” she says. “It wasn’t that important.”

...

Gemma is taking high stools off the tables, humming along to the music playing from the phone in her hand. Zolita stands at the end of the bar with a pocket mirror, skimming her eyes with a pencil. Sunlight spills through the long windows and it is lovely across the lacquered tables.

Gemma says, “Katherine!” and drops a stool on her plimsoled foot. “Ow! Bugger.”

She rubs her foot and Zolita looks past her little mirror and says, “What’s happening, Katherine?” and she rolls her shoulders and smiles and Katherine smiles and approaches the bar. The girls have a couple of coffees on the corner table and Gemma hobbles over to them. Zolita touches the T-bar and asks if she’s having a drink.

For a while it’s amusing and people say, “Of course Katherine’s having a drink!” and after a while it’s not so funny, it’s just awkward and uncomfortable.

She nods and Zolita takes a nozzle from the soda glass and starts pouring her a pint. The radio at the end of the bar crackles and Z.’s voice comes through it, “Food in the lift.”

“Breakfast!” says Gemma. She hobbles out back.

Zolita puts her beer down and Katherine pushes a score across the bar. Zolita opens the cupboard by the juice fridge and takes out the little blue notebook. She takes the betting pen from behind her ear, says, “Put this one in the Waste Book, K. As it’s you.”

“Thanks.”

Gemma brings out some plates, some bacon rolls. They smell nice. She elbows Zolita.

“Katherine’s favourite book,” she says. “You want some breakfast, Katherine?”

“No. Thanks. I’m going to sit out front.”

“Put the chairs out?”

“Yes.”

She takes some blue-roll and a spray out with her and sets her pint by the doors. She wipes the grubby tabletops until they are shiny and reflective and then she unstacks the chairs and places them and sits down with her drink. She calls Kyle. He doesn’t answer so she leaves a voicemail.

“You are going to get arrested, Kyle. And when they pick you up you can say you were with me, and you should delete this message and throw away your phone.”

She looks at her pint, goldish in the light. She’s tired. It is nice to be sitting here, to have no thoughts for the moment. Just leave them there, back there, away, the goldish light instead. Her eyes sting, she’s tired. She thinks of her dog, of how she closed her hand over its muzzle when it was sick, how its chest heaved and it defecated as it slackened quietly into death. In the same way tears come and she lets them roll hot down her cheeks, her hands heavy in her lap. She feels as though she has let go of something, slackened into something

like acceptance or defeat, something like death but not death because she's still here, sitting here, staring at nothing.

After a while Roy comes out the bank and crosses over. He touches the end of his flat cap.

"Watcha, girl."

"Hello, Roy. You having one?"

"Put on a couple of horses, babe, then I'll be in. You here for a while?"

She shrugs. "Yes."

He ambles off up the Broadway. She finishes her drink and takes her glass back to the bar. The girls are out back and the pub radio starts playing and she stands here on her own for a while as the music plays and she looks at her fractured reflection in the smeared mirror behind the optics.

She shouts to the girls, "I use the phone?" but it's not much of a shout and they don't respond. She takes the cordless phone off the back-bar and calls a cab.

"What's the name, darling?"

"Katherine."

"And where you going, Katherine?"

1. Structures of the Self

1.1. *The Waste Book* and Minimalism

Throughout *TWB*, Katherine's detached attitude towards the world finds expression in the novel's spare prose stylings, and this minimalist aesthetic facilitates the novel's overarching philosophical ambitions: to identify and detach from the structures of the self and, second, to suggest that a spare prose style eschewing psychology is better equipped to present reality *as it is*, undisturbed by a subjective interpretation of it.

Throughout the essay, the term 'minimalism' denotes what Warren Motte describes, in his study of contemporary French literary minimalism, as 'an impulse towards economy of style,'¹⁰ while acknowledging the broadness of the term.¹¹ For the purposes of this thesis, *TWB*'s minimalism is demonstrated by a lexical and stylistic tendency towards simplicity, that 'economy of style.' These stylistic proclivities facilitate a philosophical ambition to present a character who persistently detaches from the structures of the self, and a commitment to describing things free from the subjective interpretation of them. In this way, the minimalism discussed throughout the essay denotes both a stylistic economy and a philosophical strategy of reduction and exclusion, where Katherine's thought processes are either elided from the novel's descriptions or presented in such equivocal terms that they frustrate any attempt to compose from them a coherent series of motivations, a frustrating process 1.4. considers indicative of Katherine's detachment from the structures of the self. By complicating the mechanisms of a psychologically motivated fiction, the novel emphasises an

¹⁰ Motte, p. 1

¹¹ Edward Strickland (1993) attempts an overview of minimalism across medias and begins that project by stating that 'The term itself [minimalism], now common currency, appeared in the mid-sixties but was largely unheard outside of avant-garde music circles until the eighties, and no one seems certain how to define it even now.' Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) p. 1 Hereafter, *Strickland*

objective reality over any subjective interpretation of it.

Chapter three considers Robbe-Grillet's emphasis on an objective reality and scrutinises his literary project within the philosophical frameworks developed within that chapter, though it is important to point out here that even Robbe-Grillet's fictions are psychologically motivated. Robbe-Grillet's minimalist strategy of excluding interior processes and the motivations they structure invites the reader to do that work for him (Stoltzfus, 1962). In this way, the omission of psychology in minimalist fictions often creates a space for the reader to put that psychology back into the text, and this provides the interpretive 'motor', as it were, to reading and understanding those fictions. The reader extracts psychology from an interpretation of behaviour, and in this way 'the reader [...] becomes the "analyst."' ¹² In *TWB*, any attempt to reinstate Katherine's thought processes through an analysis of her actions is persistently undermined by Katherine's own careful analysis of those actions, in which her equivocation demonstrates that such psychological interpretations are unstable. By eschewing psychology or deconstructing psychological motivation through Katherine's subtle interrogation of it, the novel attains to a quietude that encourages an appreciation of Katherine outside of any interpretive framework. ¹³ To this effect, the novel's events are infrequently internalised by the characters, which facilitates an emphasis on reality as it is *to itself*, rather as it is experienced *by a subject*. This distinction positions the novel as ideologically opposed to the emphasis on interiority that characterises the Modernist novel, a stylistic and philosophical opposition explored in some depth in chapter three.

TWB's minimalism starts, philosophically, from a place of generosity; an emphasis on

¹² Ben F. Stoltzfus, 'A Novel of Objective Subjectivity: Le Voyeur by Alain Robbe-Grillet in, *PMLA*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Sept. 1962) pp. 499-507 p. 500 Hereafter, *Stoltzfus*

¹³ That this is itself an interpretive framework reintroduces the philosophical circularities that unite both my own and Lispector's text.

surface not as a parallel or reinforcer of a protagonist's bankrupt moral and emotional life, nor a mark of apathy, but as an attempt at detachment for the sake of spiritual fulfilment. To not judge people, to not ceaselessly categorise, define and explain, is, the thesis suggests, to facilitate a detachment constituting an unusual freedom.

In *TWB*'s third-person narration, everything is described from Katherine's point of view, though the novel's descriptions rarely serve to reflect Katherine's thoughts or feelings about whatever is being described. Instead, the descriptions remain entirely 'neutral', as it were; the novel's language is not loaded with Katherine's thoughts, feelings, or emotions. Characters are described swiftly, with two or three details. Tommy 'stoops needlessly under the beams'; he has 'a wonky left eye, the fingers of his left hand bent and scarred up.' (*TWB*, p. 57) Len 'speaks with his mouth almost closed, an Irishman, her father's age, rotund and droll.' (*TWB*, p.71) There is no implicit commentary here, no loaded adjectives allowing Katherine's thoughts and feelings about these men to colour the descriptions. Descriptions of place are likewise performed by a prose style shorn of any psychologically motivated stylistic flourishes:

She sets her bag under the work-surface and looks at the room, the flat counterpane, a crossed window, the wall scorched around the plug socket. Someone before her has left a saucepan on the work surface, a white dinner plate angled against it. She shifts up the window [...]. At the end of the sideboard, just inside the door, there's a white sink surrounded by a patch of grey tiles with filth in the grouting, a small cracked mirror above the taps. She drinks some water and washes her face. (*TWB*, 38)

The reader has no idea how Katherine feels about this scruffy room. Disgusted? Thrilled? However, this 'neutral' descriptive strategy is complicated by the very point it tries to make. By removing psychology from these descriptions, the novel obliquely impresses upon the reader Katherine's lack of judgement, though this assessment of Katherine's psychology can only be extracted from the descriptions themselves. Therefore, the novel's descriptive technique *is* motivated by – and therefore a reflection of – Katherine's

psychology. *TWB* is caught in a double bind. It both rejects the tendency to distort reality through a description of it filtered through a protagonist's subjective experience *and* uses the minimalist prose by which it attempts this rejection as evidence of Katherine's psychological detachment. The thesis will analyse and test these tensions.

As readers, we are so used to seeing psychologies reflected in a novel's language that the persistent lack of emotional force colouring *TWB*'s descriptions might give the impression that Katherine has no inner life to speak of. This was the novel's major challenge. How does one communicate Katherine's detachment and concomitant freedom, especially when having Katherine act as a mouthpiece for these ideas undermines the novel's motivating ethos? There are moments of concession in the novel. Towards the end of Part One, Katherine *does* talk about constructing a coherent sense of identity; she analyses her motives and 'begins to formulate an opinion of herself' (*TWB*, p. 69). Such passages explicitly articulate the ambitions this thesis seeks to explore, and the novel is arguably weaker for them.

Excepting such rare digressions, the novel more commonly refuses to explain events, to psychologise with any force or conviction. This apparently limits *TWB*'s scope, leaving it susceptible to criticisms levelled at contemporary minimalist fictions, namely that 'fictional minimalism is characterised by a narrowness, paucity, and opaqueness of vision.'¹⁴ Echoing this criticism, Jerome Klinkowitz charges the minimalist technique with 'suspend[ing] all aesthetic innovation in favour of parsing out the most mundane concerns of superficial life.'¹⁵ Frederick Barthelme, himself characterised as a practitioner of the minimalist aesthetic, responds by stating that 'a plain sentence, drab as it may seem, might be more powerful by

¹⁴ Robert Dunn, 'After Minimalism' in, *Mississippi Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 / 2 (1985) pp. 52-56 p. 54 Hereafter, *Dunn*.

¹⁵ Jerome Klinkowitz, 'The New Fiction' in Marcus Cunliffe (ed.), *The Penguin History of Literature: American Literature since 1900* (New York: Penguin, 1993) pp. 353-67 p. 364

and large than the [...] standard-issue clever sentence.’¹⁶ And John Barth defends, specifically, the minimalist aesthetic of certain contemporary American fictions (Carver, Hempel) by describing a prose style of ‘hard-edged, fine-toothed, enigmatic super-realism.’¹⁷

Further reinforcing its reductive stylistic strategy, *TWB*’s conversations are characterised by Katherine’s surprising frankness and simplicity of speech. In part three, she tells Debbie about the attack on Bob, but this ‘confession’ is divested of any epiphanic revelation through her deadpan delivery and lack of emotional investment, and the dialogue is interrupted with jarringly benign observations:

“I hit someone with an axe and when I went to trial I lied and didn’t go to prison.”

“It’s good you didn’t go to prison.”

Pause. Debbie is very beautiful, she has dark skin, her wrists are very thin, her eyes are wide. Katherine sits there with Debbie’s sadness for a while and then Debbie says, “Why did you tell me?”

“What?”

“About the man and the axe. The fucking axe. You forgot?”

Katherine laughs. “No,” she says. “I remembered. I just wondered if I should tell you. But it doesn’t matter.”

“No,” says Debs. “I don’t think it matters. You could do something nice for the man.”

“Go see him.”

“Yeah. But don’t knock on his door and say, ‘I’m the dozy bint what knocked you on the ‘ead with a axe.’”

“I wasn’t going to.” (*TWB*, p. 116)

Zoltan Abadi-Nagy (2001) suggests that literary minimalism can be compared with postmodernism, insofar as ‘minimalism is a response to the same (i.e., postmodernist) view of the world [...].’¹⁸ Like minimalism, the postmodern novel can be characterised by an emphasis on *surface* (see Herzinger, 1989), on the effacement of the border between ‘high’

¹⁶ Frederick Barthelme, “On Being Wrong: Convicted Minimalist Spills Bean [sic]” in, *New York Times Book Review*, (3 April 1988) pp. 25-27 p. 25

¹⁷ John Barth, *The Friday Book: Essays and other Non-Fiction* (New York: Putnam’s, 1984) p. 256

¹⁸ Zoltan Abadi-Nagy, ‘Minimalism vs. Postmodernism in Contemporary American Fiction’ in, *Neohelicon*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2001) p. 130 Hereafter, *Abadi-Nagy*

culture and ‘popular’ or ‘commercial’ culture and, signposting my own novel’s motivations, by its ‘dilemma of epistemological and ontological doubt.’¹⁹ If it is impossible to know the self, then, like the postmodern novel, the writer can overload the text with *stuff*, with interior processes and labyrinthine plot-developments that obscure and efface the idea of a final, totalizing ‘truth’. Nothing is stable and nothing is true, and there is something embarrassing about attaining to ‘truth’, a term so fuzzy and earnest it is best left alone. The centre cannot hold, but *TWB* firmly resists retreating into a postmodernist, celebratory anarchism. *TWB* was partly written in response to such fictions, and its ultimate aims are unashamedly idealistic, even spiritual. The novel’s minimalist leanings bear much in common with minimalism in the plastic arts, with an attempt to represent, even behold, ‘the “thingness” of the thing.’²⁰ *TWB* does not attempt to get at the thingness of the thing through philosophical interrogations. Rather, it describes things with a simple prose, determined to let things stand as they are. As Abadi-Nagy writes,

[...] while postmodernism rejects totalizability mostly by revitalizing and deconstructing totalities (metanarratives) and by parodying [...] its own attempts at totalizations, minimalism’s conspicuous elliptic incompleteness simply *dramatizes* nontotalizability by *declining* to attempt totalization (or even to parody such attempts).²¹

In terms of its attitude towards psychological fictions and interior access, *TWB*’s ‘incompleteness’ derives from its scepticism about the power of introspection to ‘truthfully’ motivate identities, though its minimalist tendencies mean that this scepticism is *demonstrated* through the prose style itself, rather than explicitly argued from within the text. In introducing a Tate guide to Minimalism in the plastic arts, Nicholas Serota and Richard Francis suggest that ‘By shifting emphasis so emphatically to direct experience [...]’

¹⁹ W. M. Verhoeven, ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Raymond Carver: Or, Much Ado About Minimalism’ in, Theo D’haen (ed.) *Narrative Turns and Minor Genres in Postmodernism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) pp. 41-60 p. 51

²⁰ *Motte* p. 9

²¹ *Abadi-Nagy* p. 131

Minimalism reorders values. It locates profound experience in ordinary experience.’²² While this might also be the (*an*) aim of a ‘minimalist’ writer like Raymond Carver,²³ the point of *TWB* is not simply to reorder values and privilege the ‘ordinary’ as being just as profound as anything else but, more simply, to suggest that the very fact of being is profound, not the stories we tell to make sense of or to *explain* the fact that we are. There is a metaphysical emphasis motivating *TWB*, which trumps any political or ideological emphasis on Katherine’s class or social milieu.

The novel’s subject matter – alcoholism, poverty, crime; a working-class protagonist, a downbeat prose style – nonetheless echoes the so-called Dirty Realism of certain contemporary American fictions, a term Bill Buford coined in his introduction to the 1983 edition of *Granta*:

Dirty Realism is the fiction of a new generation of American authors. They write about the belly-side of contemporary life – a deserted husband, an unwed mother, a car thief, a pickpocket, a drug addict – but they write about it with a disturbing detachment [...].²⁴

Such fictions employ a literary style that is typically ‘unadorned, unfurnished,’²⁵ describing characters who occupy low-rent jobs, who ‘stay in cheap motels [...] drink a lot and are often in trouble for stealing a car.’²⁶ Michael Hemmingson’s (2008) book on the Dirty Realism of Carver and Bukowski is subtitled, *The Aesthetics of the Ugly*, and the minimalist style of American fiction broadly associated with Dirty Realism often emphasises

²² Nicholas Serota and Richard Francis in, Lewis Biggs, Penelope Curtis and Jemima Pyne (eds.) *Minimalism* (Liverpool: Tate Publishing, 1989) p. 7

²³ In an interview for *The Paris Review*, Carver himself resisted the term: “‘There’s something about ‘minimalist’ that smacks of smallness of vision and execution that I don’t like.’” Raymond Carver interviewed by Mona Simpson and Lewis Buzbee in, *The Paris Review: The Art of Fiction*, No. 76, Issue 88 (Summer, 1983) ><https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3059/raymond-carver-the-art-of-fiction-no-76-raymond-carver>< [accessed August 30th, 2019]

²⁴ Bill Buford, ‘Dirty Realism’ in, *Granta*, Vol. 8 (Summer 1983) Hereafter, *Buford*. This list of writers commonly associated with Dirty Realism include Charles Bukowski, Raymond Carver, Tobias Wolff, Richard Ford, Larry Brown, Frederick Barthelme, Cormac McCarthy, and Jayne Anne Phillips.

²⁵ Abadi-Nagy p. 130

²⁶ *Buford*, *Granta* p. 1

the seamier side of life.

Clark (2014) considers Dirty Realist fictions, particularly Carver's, as indicative of a naturalist (rather than realist) treatment of determinacy. Characters are overwhelmed by a fate over which they have no control; their lack of agency reinforced by an unaffected, stripped-back prose style that testifies to their protagonists' helplessness. Nothing these characters can do, within the limits of their imagination and experience, can change their situation, and any catharsis or epiphanic insight the stories lead towards often – ironically – comes from recognising this fact. In a comparative study of Carver and Crane, Banks (1991) suggests that in Carver's fiction 'fate seems locked on to the life-shaping power of the domestic mundane, the mess and grind of ordinary life' but that Carver's argument against a tragic determinism is 'driven by love.'²⁷ *TWB* is certainly a work of realism, and a consideration of how far it identifies with the naturalist mode can suggest the novel demonstrates, even performs, these terminological tensions. Katherine's agency is suppressed by her drinking, and so Katherine brings upon herself the determinism that inhibits her own agency. However, throughout the novel, the stylistic minimalism reinforcing her detachment is not intended to be straightforwardly suppressive. Quite the opposite. Katherine's detachment renders her *indifferent* to a fateful determinism that is further evidenced in the back-and-forth structure of the novel's timelines, with her 'present' recovery undercut by her 'past' drinking. The treatment of fate and determinacy, then, is far more ambiguous in *TWB* than one could argue is the case in a writer like Carver, and certainly more so than in the brutal inevitability of the original naturalists, as typified by Zola's fictions, in which characters like Gervaise in *L'Assomoir* (1877) or Etienne in *Germinal* (1885) succumb to their genealogical fates regardless of will or conviction.

²⁷ Russell Banks, 'Raymond Carver: Our Stephen Crane' in, *Atlantic*, Vol. 268, No. 2 (1991) pp. 92-99 p. 99

TWB identifies, then, with the stylistic tendencies and thematic preoccupations of Dirty Realism but rejects, or at least ambiguates, the naturalist tendencies of such fictions. *TWB*'s minimalism is a stylistic strategy, emerging as a characteristic aesthetic from its uncomplicated sentence structure and relatively unadventurous syntax, but its minimalist *attitude* is likewise expressed in its lack of overt theorising. These stylistic and ideological 'minimalisms' apparently reinforce the limited and repetitive nature of Katherine's life, though her attitude towards the novel's events, her persistent fascination with the simple fact that she exists, is an attempt to transcend this rudimentary form / content mirroring. The novel's minimalist reductionism in fact allows Katherine to remove herself from the constraining lifestyle that this same strategy apparently reinforces. Once again, there is an undeniable tension and ambiguity in this ambition. In passages like those of chapter ten, part two, the novel's stylistic economy and unemotive prose straightforwardly catalogues the spiralling progression of her illness, reinforcing her powerlessness.

She leaves all the windows open until one night when it's black out and the wind buffets the van and she gets out of bed for no real reason and collapses on the bedroom floor. She lies here crying or laughing while her stomach convulses and then she crawls through to the front room, spritzes the place with Airwick, closes all the windows and crouches in front of the little gas fire. She fiddles around with it and finally gets it lit and the warmth is strange and lovely. She pulls her quilts through and makes a nest on the floor and sets a beer by her hands.

She sleeps. (*TWB*, p. 170)

Elsewhere, that same stylistic economy and lack of expressiveness allows Katherine to slip free of any effort to explain her, which avoidance seems to typify her ability *not* to be constrained by the stories of addiction by which she might otherwise be contained.

Opposing postmodernism, minimalism attempts

to go directly to the heart of things [which] testifies [...] to minimalism's essentialist position, for, unlike many contemporary artists, minimalists assume that things *have*

a heart, a core, a centre.²⁸

TWB's emphasis on plain prose is concerned with allowing its descriptions – of things, of actions, of movement – to stand as they are, without commentary, so that their *existence* finally becomes remarkable. A commitment to realism is not – not always – a commitment to facts, to reportage. There is a spiritual ambition behind a commitment to limpid prose, where the thingness of the thing elevates the sentence, makes of it a real thing that one encounters, rather than an elaborate construct one merely enjoys. Kafka knew this. Flaubert knew this. William Gass admits as much but errs forcefully on the side of experimentation and expansiveness, suggesting that to write is to play, to 'forswear a wager and bear to lose,' while a literary minimalism, with its words 'nailed like shingles to the page [...] makes every day a dull Sunday.'²⁹ It is this very instinct to *play*, to make writing a game or an entertainment, that *TWB* writes against; not through a dreary commitment to dull Sundays, but a real conviction that such clear, straightforward prose can gesture beyond itself.

The second decade of the twenty-first century, a period that is loudly clamouring to be known as the 'post-truth' age, is surely a political and cultural embrace of postmodern anxiety to bewildering, totalising effect. In such a climate, one could argue that a minimalist prose, a literary quietude, represents a welcome rejoinder. A fiction which reflects the information-saturation of the digital age, presenting a fragmented narrative – or series of narratives – that resembles 'channel-surfing'³⁰ and the diminishing attention-span of Western media culture might seem to paraphrase or encapsulate the culture in which it exists. Such a

²⁸ *Motte*, p. 6

²⁹ William Gass, *The Tunnel* (Illinois: The Dalkey Archive, 2012) p. 21

³⁰ This phrase was used by critics to describe Augustin Fernando Mallo's fragmented, multi-stranded novel, *Nocilla Dream* (2006). See, Jessica Loudis 'Channel-Surfing: Agustín Fernández Mallo's Contemporary Epic' in, *The Nation* (March 2019) ><https://www.thenation.com/article/agustin-fernandez-mallo-nocilla-dream-review/>< [Accessed August 30th, 2019]

fiction is more conservative than is commonly accepted; it is a harking-back to the mimetic ambitions of classical realism, as though the novel were a clean mirror reflecting the world back at us. As Nelson writes, this tendency towards ‘the imitative fallacy’ seems to reason thus: ‘contemporary life is mind-scrambling, fragmented, and distracted, so my art must be mind-scrambling, fragmented, and distracted, too.’³¹ Nelson rejects the superficiality of this response, and *TWB* echoes her concern, motivated as it is by a weariness with the *noise* and overabundance of postmodernism and the ‘hysterical realism’ trailing in its wake, a term coined by the critic James Woods in his review of Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000):

The big contemporary novel is a perpetual-motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. It seems to want to abolish stillness, as if ashamed of silence [...]. This is not magical realism. It is hysterical realism.³²

As Lispector herself complains, ‘I am well aware of what the so-called true novel is. Yet when I read it, with its webs of facts and descriptions, I am simply bored.’³³ *TWB* is an(other) attempt at a literature ‘free from subjective intrusion, without the didactic hectoring of popular writing.’³⁴

By clearing away the noise, *TWB* suggests, and focussing on things *as they are to themselves*, one can abstract oneself from one’s interpretation of the world; one can begin to experience the world as it is without oneself. This facilitates a detachment from the structures and stories of the self, and instead emphasise a simple appreciation of *beingness*. Katherine herself gestures towards these spiritually-inflected ambitions when she reads from her work, *The Waste Book*, a novel, and thereby offers a rare moment of commentary on the text she has composed, a text which seems to bear much in common with the text in which she exists:

³¹ Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty* (London: Norton, 2012) p. 50.

³² James Woods, ‘Human, All Too Human’ in, *The New Republic* (July 24th, 2000) ><https://newrepublic.com/article/61361/human-inhuman>< [accessed May 15th, 2019]

³³ Quoted in Benjamin Moser, *Why This World? A Biography of Clarice Lispector* (London: Haus Publishing, 2009) p. 261

³⁴ *Biguenet*, p. 40

It feels obvious to Katherine that there is nothing particularly interesting about this young woman but that we need to follow her in this way in order for something silent and almost visible to trail in her wake. What is not said is given form by what is, and the absence begins to make itself felt. (*TWB*, p. 130)

As a political programme, *TWB*'s detachment may seem individualist, even defeatist, though Katherine's extreme lack of judgement is intended to serve as an example. If everyone responded to the world the way Katherine does, then shame, resentment, and judgementalism would largely evaporate. Katherine's example is intended as a profoundly principled gesture, though the narrative in which this gesture occurs is designed to ambiguate its idealism. *TWB* describes Katherine's end-days drinking and her slow recovery, facilitated by Alcoholics Anonymous. AA teaches surrender as the first step towards recovery and spiritual growth, which allows for a subtle inversion of the idea that 'minimalism is a work of resignation.'³⁵ Not a resignation, then, but a surrender. *TWB* does not encourage a retreat from interpretation as an apathetic response to uncertainty; it encourages the reader to challenge the structures of the self, even abandon them, and presents Katherine as someone whose detachment renders her surprisingly free.

1.2 Introducing Dostoevsky and Lispector

Criticisms of the minimalist aesthetic are perhaps best exemplified through the paradigmatic rivalry between Faulkner and Hemingway. Their radically opposed signature styles present an opposition between, on the one hand, a thrilling lexical and syntactic adventurousness and expressionistic prose style and, on the other, a severe stylistic economy and journalistic directness. Faulkner levelled at Hemingway a lack of ambition echoed by later criticisms of

³⁵ Dunn, p. 54

American fiction broadly inclined towards a stylistic minimalism,³⁶ while Hemingway's severe reductionism was aimed towards a distillation and economy antithetical to Faulknerian expansiveness.

Although *TWB*'s style seems to bear the influence of Hemingway's terse, minimalist prose, this thesis focusses on literary influences whose characteristic stylistic choices are perhaps more akin to Faulkner's own.³⁷ Chapter two considers Dostoevsky, whose wrought, pacing, polyphonic novels are so full with events, voices and ideas that his works can be comfortably positioned within a literary-historical tradition that follows Gogol in Russia and the big, serial novels in Victorian England. Pointing to the relative youth of the Russian novel in the mid-nineteenth century, George Steiner (1996) suggests Dostoevsky's works bear fruitful stylistic and formal comparisons to the American novel of the same period, notably Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), itself a wildly expansive work both stylistically and thematically. While the empiricism and classical sensibility of the European novel claims for its own 'the kingdom of this world,'³⁸ American and Russian literature of the period, lacking this historical tradition, crosses the frontiers of empirical realism, opening the way to Kafkaesque alienation and Modernism's interiority ('We cross these frontiers,' writes Steiner, 'when we pass from the world of *Bleak House* to that of *The Castle*.'³⁹) Dostoevsky's acute

³⁶ Faulkner famously criticised Hemingway's writing style as lacking courage, in response to which Hemingway recruited a former WWII comrade to write a letter of commendation attesting to his bravery. Hemingway's response to Faulkner's ambitious and complex style was to say, 'Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words?' A. E. Hotchner, *Papa Hemingway* (New York: Scribner: 1999) p. 134

³⁷ There are passages in *The Besieged City* (2014), a text that is at once the strangest and most conventional of Lispector's novels, that do in fact recall the groping repetitions and expressiveness of Faulkner: 'Things were growing with deep tranquillity. Sao Geraldo was displaying itself. She standing facing the bright world. Felipe was talking with lost sound... Even the noises of the township were arriving dismantled in a pale round of applause. The girl was looking while standing, constant, with her patient falcon-like existence. Everything was incomparable. [...] And on the bright threshold of the night all of a sudden the world was the orb. On the threshold of the night, an instant of muteness was the silence, appearing was an appearance, the city a fortress, victims were offerings. And the world was the orb.' Clarice Lispector, *The Besieged City*, trans. by Johnny Lorenz (London: Penguin, 2019) p. 50

³⁸ George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism* (London: Yale University Press, 1996) p. 29 Hereafter, *Steiner*

³⁹ *Steiner*, p. 29

psychological peregrinations prefigure the experiments of Joyce and Woolf, and onwards, even, to the ‘maximalist’ monsters of mid-twentieth century American fiction by writers like Gaddis and Gass. Stylistically, then, Dostoevsky’s fictions are as opposed to *TWB* as Faulkner’s were to Hemingway’s, while Lispector’s fiction, whose *The Passion According to G.H.* features prominently in this thesis, is, stylistically, as unlike Dostoevsky’s prose style as Dostoevsky’s is unlike my own. Lispector’s peculiar novels are distinguished by a profoundly ambitious and idiosyncratic syntax, by fragmentary sentences which, as Benjamin Moser puts it in his introduction to *Agua Viva* (2012), ‘veer towards abstraction without ever quite reaching it.’⁴⁰ One could add that Lispector’s work veers towards both abstraction and *absurdism*, pulling back from both with moments of disorientating clarity. To pick an example almost at random, this is from *Agua Viva*:

I am coherent – my canticle is profound. Slow. But rising. Rising still. If it rises much more it will become full moon and silence, and phantasmagoric lunar soil. On the lookout for the time that stops. What I write you is serious. It will become a hard imperishable object. What is coming is unexpected. To be uselessly sincere I must say that now it is six fifteen in the morning.⁴¹

Lispector’s self-reflexive mode and formal experimentation position her attitudinally, perhaps, as a practitioner of or precursor to postmodernism, while her preoccupation with naming the unnameable suggests her as a child of Samuel Beckett. Fitz (2001) makes the case that, despite her apparent lack of interest in the poststructuralist movement, Lispector’s novels, particularly *A Breath of Life* (2014) and *Hour of the Star* (2014), can be read as deconstructionist texts par excellence. Ultimately, however, Lispector sits awkwardly in any logical chain of influences. She is a true original. Perhaps Helene Cixous gives us the most poetic expression of Lispector’s peculiarly conjuring prose in a phrase that is, suitably,

⁴⁰ Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*, trans. by Stefan Tobler (London: Penguin, 2014) p. xii Hereafter, *Lispector, Agua Viva*

⁴¹ *Lispector, Agua Viva* p. 37

immediate, clear, and cryptic. ‘There is a way of saying “tulip,”’ she writes, ‘that kills every tulip. There is a Clarice way of making-the-tulip.’⁴²

Given this brief précis of their styles, Dostoevsky and Lispector may seem an unlikely, even jarring pairing. While acknowledging the obvious – and pronounced – differences in style, the thesis argues that Dostoevsky, Lispector, and myself are in one way or another devoted to a similar philosophical programme, centred around challenging the notion of the self. These chapters consider, predominantly, *TWB*’s efforts to achieve, through Katherine, a detachment from the structures of the self. This attempt is facilitated by a pared-down, minimalist aesthetic, while in both Dostoevsky and Lispector that same philosophical ambition is attempted through their fiercely interrogative fictions, fictions which overtly present, analyse and argue for and against that same detachment.

Throughout the thesis, stylistic influences on *TWB* take a back seat to philosophical ones. Although I am instinctively attracted to a literary style distinguished by ‘severity of means, clarity of form and simplicity’,⁴³ novelists whose aesthetic demonstrates these qualities provide only superficial influences. It is the philosophical underpinning of my own novel’s motivations which provides the basis for discussions of literary influence, and so although the stylistic differences between my own work and the novels of Dostoevsky and Lispector is such that the three represent an apparently peculiar triumvirate, the thesis argues that all three are motivated by similar philosophical ambitions. The thesis uses the philosophical preoccupations it sees in those novelists to clarify and interrogate my own, and where divergences and philosophical problems arise, they afford a means to sharpen the focus of my own intentions. The lack of anguish Katherine demonstrates while presenting this

⁴² Helene Cixous, ‘The Approach,’ trans. by Sarah Cornell in Deborah Jenson (ed.), *“Coming to Writing” and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 72 Hereafter, *Cixous, Approach*

⁴³ *Strickland*, p. 4

detachment from the self contrasts sharply with the fraught psychological struggles that dominate the Lispector and Dostoevsky novels the thesis examines. Katherine begins from a place of detachment that those other protagonists never manage to attain. *TWB* was highly influenced by those texts, but it does not repeat their experiments; instead, it aims to start where they leave off. *TWB*'s minimalist aesthetic does not respond to minimalism per se; it is a philosophical strategy inspired by writers whose own aesthetic is rarely characterised by a comparable aesthetic asceticism.

1.3. Structures of the Self

This section considers in more detail the novel's first overarching ambition: to detach from the structures of the self. While writing *TWB*, this attempt found clear expression in Lispector's short, existential novel, *The Passion*, in which the protagonist, G.H. (presumably, *género humano*: humankind), uses her encounter with a dying cockroach to contemplate those structures that enable her to assemble a coherent sense of self. Through this process of fixation, G.H. attempts to not only detach from the structures of her identity, but from the self as an experiential subject, the very perspective through which this detachment occurs; a philosophical ambition frustrated by the very self attempting that act of dissolution. This analysis of Lispector's novel requires a distinction between the *self* as the locus of experience and the *self concept*, an entity scaffolded by those intersubjective, conceptual, and linguistic processes that integrate the self into broader structures. This distinction in turn provides an interpretive framework with which to contextualise Katherine's response to the world. Starting with Lispector's philosophical deconstruction of the self, this chapter aims to clarify the boundaries of Katherine's detachment. G.H. detaches from the self concept through a systematic interrogation of those structures by which it is composed, while Katherine was

written as someone who, intuitively, sees no need to engage with those structures in the first place.

The following sections draw on theory at the intersection of philosophy of mind and cognitive science (Damasio, 1995, 2000; Metzinger, 2004, 2010, 2014; Zahavi, 2007), as well as the fields of social psychology (Haslam and McGarty, 1994; Turner et al., 1987, 1994) in order to contextualise conversations around the self. Chapter two will consider the self as an entity organised in narrative terms, as ‘fundamentally self-interpreting,’⁴⁴ alongside Strawson’s (2007; 2014) Non-Narrative and Episodic consideration of the self; a sense of self which ‘may simply lack any narrative tendency.’⁴⁵ What these considerations of the self have in common is an analysis or presupposition of *perspective*, a focalising point of view from which these aspects of the self are experienced. When he ‘looks inside’ and sees nothing but a ‘bundle’ of perceptions with nothing at their centre, Hume presupposed such a point of view,⁴⁶ and Paul Ricoeur brings out the inconsistency of this conception:

Here, then, is *someone* who claims to be unable to find anything but a datum stripped of selfhood; *someone* who penetrates within himself, seeks and declares to have found nothing. [...] With the question Who? – who is seeking, stumbling, and not finding, and who perceives? – the self returns just when the same slips away.⁴⁷

An originary *sense* of self, the perspective which eluded Hume’s analysis, is shaped by interaction. Dan Zahavi (2015) suggests this indicates the self ‘is both innate and transformed by social interaction.’⁴⁸ Such arguments claim that an intersubjectively formulated sense of selfhood depends on an innate ‘minimal self’ (Gallagher, 2000;

⁴⁴ Marya Schechtman, ‘The Narrative Self’ in, Shaun Gallagher (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p. 395 Hereafter, *Schechtman, Narrative Self*

⁴⁵ *Strawson, Ethics* p. 86

⁴⁶ ‘[...] when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception.’ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin, 1969) p. 300

⁴⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) p. 128

⁴⁸ Dan Zahavi, ‘Self and Other: From Pure Ego to Co-Constituted We’ in, *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2015) pp. 143-160 p. 143 Hereafter, *Zahavi, Self and Other*

Strawson, 2013) that precedes and facilitates the organisation of it into more sophisticated, intersubjective structures. This distinguishes between a subject of experience with its sense of *mineness*⁴⁹ and identity, the intersubjective constructs by which this originary self (*ipseity*) is organised. Personality theory and work in the social sciences often divides the self in a similar way (Oyserman et al. 2012), where one's sense of identity and the personality it structures is distinct from 'being conscious of having a self.'⁵⁰ This foundational knowledge enables a subject to structure its consciousness of 'having' a self within broader explanatory constructs. The thesis employs a similar distinction and uses the term 'self' to denote a subject's experiential sense of mineness, and 'self concept' or 'conceptual self' (interchangeably) to refer to the conceptual entity organised and structured by intersubjectivity and self-reflection.

Strawson (2000) recapitulates the almost inexhaustible theoretical vantages from which the self can be analysed, providing a list which includes the cognitive self, the conceptual self, the contextualised, core, dialogic, ecological, embodied, emergent, empirical, existential, and extended selves, etcetera, a list that clearly illustrates the closely circumscribed nature of the present discussion.⁵¹ These passages swiftly traverse a lot of ground with the aim of clarifying this distinction between just *two* considerations of the self: self as experiential subject, and self concept as the broader formulation of the experiential perspective, a distinction developed so that it can be applied as an analytical model through which to demonstrate and clarify Katherine's detachment from the self concept. This distinction further explains G.H.'s failure to detach from the self altogether, thereby

⁴⁹ Slors and Jongepier (2003) describe 'the intimate familiarity we have with our own thoughts, perceptions and emotions' as a sense of 'mineness'. Marc Slors and Fleur Jongepier, 'Mineness Without Minimal Selves' in, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 7 (July 2014) pp. 193-219, p. 193

⁵⁰ Daphna Oyserman, 'Self-Concept and Identity' in, A. Tesser and N. Schwartz (eds.), *The Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology* (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2001) pp. 499-517 p. 499

⁵¹ Galen Strawson, 'The Phenomenology and Ontology of the Self' in Dan Zahavi (ed.), *Exploring the Self: Philosophical and Psychopathological Perspectives on Self-Experience* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2000) p. 39

presenting this distinction as a crucial means of understanding my own work, the major influences here discussed, and the relationship between them. It seems intuitively self-evident that in order for the self to be organised into broader structures, there must be something there to be organised,⁵² though Kyselo (2016) warns that distinguishing between self and self concept in dichotomous terms can obscure rather than clarify the complexity of the relationship between the two.⁵³

Discussions for and against a minimal self continue in the field of cognitive science and philosophy and mind.⁵⁴ What is important for present purposes is this *conceptual* distinction between the subject's first-personal perspective and the broader structures by which that perspective orientates and organises, whether or not these dichotomous conceptions of the self can be considered irrefutably, empirically valid. It is Katherine's psychological detachment that entails her relative freedom, and if this distinction can be clearly conceptualised then it can *applied* as a psychological tool with which to attain such freedom. The suggestion is that Katherine applies just such a conceptualisation of the self as easily divisible (self and self concept), but that she does so intuitively, without ever explicitly formulating or expounding the technique. It is therefore the job of the thesis to offer a theoretical framework through which to analyse and conceptualise that distinction.

Katherine has little in the way of a conceptual self, as it is defined by Oyserman et al.

⁵² Damasio uses this same argument to refute the notion that the self is a purely linguistic construct: 'If language operates for consciousness in the same way that it operates for everything else, that is, by symbolizing in words and sentences what exists first in a nonverbal form, then there must be a nonverbal self and a nonverbal knowing for which the words "I" or "me" or the phrase "I know" are the appropriate translations [...].'
Damasio, What Happens p. 108

⁵³ 'Clearly, human subjective experience reveals that my experiences are given to me as mine, and not as yours. And an authentic understanding of other minds presupposes the existence of (at least) two distinct experiential lives. However, extrapolating from this important phenomenological insight to a more general account of the minimal self risks developing a distorted and perhaps too idealistic picture of selfhood—a view on human existence that is, from the outset, separate and solipsistic: first we have a clear sense of self, as a distinct experiential subject, then we encounter others as others.' Miriam Kyselo, 'The Minimal Self Needs a Social Update' in, *Philosophical Psychology* (2016) p. 1

⁵⁴ For a partial disputation of Zahavi's view of the minimal self, see Kym Maclaren, 'Embodied Perceptions of Others as a Condition of Selfhood?' in, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol 15, No. 8 (2008) pp. 63-93.

(2012). According to their review of literatures on the self, self concept describes, ‘what comes to mind when one thinks about oneself’ and is a kind of summary of one’s *identities*: ‘Identities are the traits, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is.’⁵⁵ What does someone with little attachment to these influences have to *say* about themselves? Not much, which is a concise account of Katherine’s reflections upon herself.

“What do you think of yourself? What sort of person do you see yourself as, deep down?”

She isn’t sure where to start, or why. It would be a story without a backbone, a narrative without a centre. [...] She tries to look at her past, the way her feelings intersect with her actions [...] She tries to isolate a turning point, something pivotal, something she can confidently present to both herself and Christine as evidence of a clear and sensible narrative. It seems unnecessary. (*TWB*, p. 45)

Developing a self concept constituting an interpretive framework through which to ‘make sense’ of her past, seems, to Katherine, ‘unnecessary’. It is *this* aspect of Katherine’s psychological freedom that this and later chapters emphasise.

Damasio (1995; 2000) considers the self in stages, with the phenomenology of the self, the feeling that these processes *belong to me*, representative of what he calls the ‘core consciousness’ of a ‘proto-self’, ‘the unvarnished sense of our individual organism in the act of knowing.’⁵⁶ A similar conception of the phenomenology⁵⁷ of selfhood can be found in Neisser’s (1998) ‘ecological self.’ The phenomenology of selfhood both generates a perspective and is constituted by the perspective it generates. Metzinger (2010) characterises

⁵⁵ Daphne Oyserman, Kristen Elmore, and George Smith, ‘Self, Self-Concept, and Identity’ in, Mark R. Leary, and June Price Tangney (eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012) p. 69 Hereafter, *Oyserman et al.*

⁵⁶ *Damasio, What Happens* p. 125

⁵⁷ I follow Metzinger (2010) in stressing that ‘phenomenology’ ‘is used here, and throughout, in the philosophical sense, as pertaining to what is known purely experientially, through the way in which things subjectively *appear* to you.’ Thomas Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) p. 5 Hereafter, *Metzinger, Ego*. However, when explicitly discussing the history and method of Phenomenology as a philosophical movement, I will capitalise the first letter, as in ‘Husserl’s Phenomenology.’

this self-supporting circularity as an ‘Ego Tunnel’.⁵⁸ The feeling – *this is me* – is integrated into broader structures and organised conceptually, and in this way the conceptual self ‘emerges out of the self-organizing interaction between a large number of simpler components.’⁵⁹

As Metzinger points out, even if theories of the structural nature of the self are convincing, it is impossible for you or me to fully believe in them, as the assertion of such a belief depends on the very self apparently dissolved by these theories. ‘This fact,’ writes Metzinger, ‘is the true essence and the deepest core of what we *actually* mean when speaking about the “puzzle” – or sometimes even about the “mystery” – of consciousness.’⁶⁰ This contradiction lies at the heart of Lispector’s novel, where her attempt to re-present the conditions under which she achieved a detachment from the self reifies the very concept she is purporting to dissolve.

The conceptual self coheres in interaction, and if the interpersonal self is, ‘[...] the self as engaged in immediate unreflective social interaction,’⁶¹ this elaborate edifice is held in place by the reflection of ourselves we see in interaction with others. As Lispector writes, ‘I am whatever others see of me. When I was alone, there was no break, only slightly less of what I was in company.’ (*The Passion*, p. 18) Heidegger (2010) considers the self as structured intersubjectively as an ‘inauthentic’ *falling away* from the self unstructured by

⁵⁸ ‘The phenomenal Ego is not some mysterious thing or little man inside the head but the content of an inner image – namely, the conscious self-model, or PSM [Phenomenal Self-Model]. By placing the self-model within the world-model, a center is created. That center is what we experience as ourselves, the Ego. It is the origin of what philosophers call the first-person perspective. [...] We live our conscious lives in the Ego Tunnel.’ Metzinger, *Ego* p. 7

⁵⁹ Thomas Metzinger, ‘The No-Self Alternative’ in Shaun Gallagher (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 282

⁶⁰ Metzinger, *No One* p. 627

⁶¹ Ulric Neisser, ‘Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge’ in, *Philosophical Psychology*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (1998) pp. 35-59 p. 391

these processes,⁶² an intuition shared by Lispector's protagonist, and a sentiment that motivates *TWB*'s detachment from the structures of the self concept. Both novels – Lispector's and my own – present the conceptual self, in its fluent changeability, as, simultaneously, an admirably flexible orientating mechanism, and a distraction from the 'pure experience' of the originary self.

...

TWB opens with Katherine in rehab and swiftly skips back to the last days of her drinking, where her lack of attachment to any coherent sense of identity is evidenced in the way her concentration drifts:

The afternoon is fading though the light hasn't changed, the light has always been like this, she thinks.

You're confused, Katherine. (*TWB* p. 23)

The illeism further clarifies a jarring sense of detachment, signifying the extent of Katherine's instability. She 'rests into her name,' coming back to herself, and when the novel moves back to the B&B room in east London, her lack of attachment to the conceptual self is exaggerated once again by the numbing effects of her drinking: 'Her mind irises closed and when it opens out again she feels as though she's been asleep but she hasn't, she's just been sitting here.' (*TWB* p. 26)

The unnerving quietude of these opening pages suggest that Katherine's destructive lifestyle has simply divorced her from the capacity to construct a coherent self concept, though this assumption is challenged as she moves into recovery. Once in treatment, Katherine's friends and carers attempt to 'make sense' of her, to encourage her to attach to a

⁶² '[...] Dasein is initially and for the most part *together with* the "world" [...] This absorption in [the world] mostly has the character of being lost in the publicness of the they. As an authentic potentiality for being a self, Dasein has initially always already fallen away from itself and fallen prey to the "world".' Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) p. 169

story that can contextualise her drinking and explain the trajectory of her life, yet she slips free of their efforts with ease. Even when her alcoholism is arrested, Katherine experiences no attachment to her own self concept. Beginning with a perspective, the self recognises itself *as* itself, then it typically looks out at the world and organises its experiences. As Lispector phrases this process, ‘[...] the rest were the always organizations of myself [...] The rest was the way I’d transformed myself little by little into the person who bears my name.’ (*The Passion*, p. 17) Katherine resists these ‘always organisations’. It is her detachment from the structures of the self concept that makes it so difficult for people to characterise Katherine through an analysis of her relationships, or the way she responds to questions about those relationships. As Katherine’s friend, Debbie, remarks, “‘I don’t think you have much of a self. Not the way the rest of us have it.’” (*TWB* p. 117). Debbie is not saying, of course, that Katherine is not an experiential entity, but that she refuses – or is unable – to contextualise that entity within the broader structures of an extended or conceptual self. In other words, Katherine refuses to engage in the structuring of her own self concept.

Lispector, too, is committed to interrogating the structures by which the originary sense of self is organised, and in deconstructing these processes she exposes the foundational nature of the perspective – hers – from which she cannot detach. In a rare moment of panic, my own protagonist seems to confront her irreducible perspective as a physical *thing* at the core of herself, and attempts to rid herself of it.

She tells herself [...] that she’s feeling better, but there’s something beneath the feeling, something she can’t quite excavate, this final, tight morsel of herself that just won’t be exposed. She wants to dig it out, to discard it, [...] but there it always is, this crouched remainder, the irreconcilable remainder that just will not budge, no matter how aggressively she tries, no matter how bright and inspired her rearrangement of the formula. Remainder, Katherine. (*TWB* p. 157)

Haslam and McGarty et al. (1994) consider the way culture and context shape the conceptual self and are shaped by it, suggesting that ‘[...] the self is not a relatively fixed

mental structure but the expression of a dynamic process of social judgment.’⁶³ Such an emphasis marks ‘a shift towards the perception of the self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of the self as a unique person.’⁶⁴ The use of ‘self’ here does not denote the experiential sense of mineness, but rather the relatively flexible identity into which it is elaborated. Such analyses of the self take the experiential subject as given and consider the way the self concept is structured intersubjectively, concluding that the self as a whole is an eminently changeable phenomenon. This is a modest reiteration of a Foucauldian analysis of the self, which considers the subject as ‘merely a position in a linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic system of power relations.’⁶⁵ However, the fluidity of the self concept is essential. If society shapes that concept, then the process of being shaped marks the subject’s passage through that system. Flexibility of the self concept enables the subject to navigate sensibly through life. ‘I was a woman of whom you could say, “life and loves of G.H.”’ (*The Passion*, p. 168) writes G.H., almost lamenting the capacity to encapsulate a person within such neat approximations of their identity.

In *TWB*, the fragments Katherine introduces into the text comment with subtle irony on the idea that we can *know* someone based on an analysis of their place in these orientating structures: ‘No, we might say, that doesn’t sound like her. Or: Yes, that sounds like Katherine.’ (*TWB*, p. 151) Such straightforward psychological structures – anticipating how a person is likely to behave in line with what we know of their past behaviour – defines a sense of self that Katherine’s fragment obliquely challenges. The essay’s insistence on a self as distinct from the self concept makes sense of such a challenge. The schematic she outlines is

⁶³ John C. Turner, Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam and Craig McGarty, ‘Self and Collective: Cognition and Social Context’ in, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (October, 1994) pp. 454-65 p. 458. Hereafter, *Turner et al., Self and Collective*.

⁶⁴ J. C. Turner, M. Hogg, P. Oakes, S. Reicher and M. Wetherall, *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press, 1987) p. 50

⁶⁵ Francesca Parmeggiani, ‘Resisting Identities: Fleur Jaeggy’s Life Stories’ in, *Forum Italicum*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (2004) pp. 166-186

a bloodless recapitulation of the conceptual self and pays no mind to the foundational experience of *being*.

Lispector suggests, however, that if one detaches from the conceptual self then there is little left to say. *The Passion* is committed to explaining the self that remains after the structures which elaborate it into a formulable concept have been dismantled, which means that she has no choice but to take up the very structures she has disassembled in order to comment on the process: 'I'll inevitably succumb to the need for form that comes from my terror of remaining undelimited.' (*The Passion*, p. 7) Katherine has no such terror, no need for a conception of the self that can be summarised as a give-and-take intersubjective scaffolding of that concept, a process from which the 'I' as a coherent concept emerges.

'What others get from me,' writes Lispector, 'is then reflected back onto me, forming the atmosphere called: "I"' (*The Passion*, p. 19). Cause – the reflection of herself she sees in others – is followed by effect: "I". Lispector's performative instantiation of the self as a concept sustained by that which is reflected back at her demonstrates the changeability of that concept. *TWB*, however, does not criticise this changeability for pessimistic ends. Rather than suggesting that the self is changeable and that therefore 'knowing someone' is impossible, *TWB* suggests that acknowledging these fluctuations relieves us of the attempt to interpret people at all. This idea, too, takes inspiration from minimalist practices in the plastic arts, where presenting things *as they are* encourages the viewer to experience things rather than merely *recognise* them. Of course, without the language and concepts categorisation affords, there is little to *say* about such an appreciation of the world, which is exemplified through Katherine's relatively limited dialogic interactions.

If the self concept is as changeable as studies indicate, then what does this do to such enshrined ambitions of (Western) human individuation as *finding ourselves*, or being our *true selves*? Katherine's lack of any attachment to the concepts which could give such ambitions

any structure may lead one to conclude that she does not ‘know’ herself, but if the concept one is attempting to know is an ongoing sequence of adaptations, then, in a sense, there is no self to know. *TWB* therefore positions itself in direct contrast to that abiding ambition of the *Bildungsroman* or the coming-of-age story, to novels in which the protagonist pursues the ambition of *finding themselves*, of discovering *who they are*. In chapter six of part one, Katherine reads ‘*Who am I?*’ written on the wall in a toilet cubicle. The response represents a rare moment of sarcasm: ‘Underneath it, *Who cares?*’ (*TWB*, p. 49)

The novel eschews such irony elsewhere, as Katherine’s rejection of the self concept is not positioned as a political or philosophical posture. Katherine does not seem to reject anything; she just is. This means that she does not have to fall back on those concepts she has rejected in order to formulate a conception of the self ‘left behind’. She avoids the circularities G.H. cannot, and in 2.2. the thesis will consider fictions by Dostoevsky in which characters’ attempts at freedom from the self are stymied by a need to account for the self left behind.

1.4. Motivating Identity

Katherine rarely offers an interpretive commentary on what is happening and how she is feeling about it. When the novel does elaborate upon Katherine’s thought processes, those processes are so equivocal that the psychological motivation resulting from them is disturbed. Her drinking is followed by a period of treatment and sustained recovery, followed by the ‘return’ of her past in the figure of Kyle, and the reappearance of patterns of behaviour that characterised her drinking. However, these events – *what happens* – do not seem to contribute to Katherine’s sense of identity; she does not analyse these events in order to ascertain how she feels about what happens and compose a version of the self based on these

analyses. If she does consider how she feels about something, and how that feeling could encourage how she responds to it, Katherine understands that such an analysis of cause and effect leaves tremendous room for error. For example, in part three of the novel, her friend, Tommy, relapses. When Katherine catches up with him, she wonders why she is there. She interprets what has happened in light of how she feels about it, and she understands that she could use this synthesis to explain what she is doing now. Finally, she recognises the instability of this reasoning process and decides it does not matter which, if any, of these schematics are ‘true’.

Perhaps she is here out of love for him, to save him, compelled by memories of their intimacy. Perhaps she is here to follow him down to wherever he is going, suddenly overwhelmed by the weight of it all. She will decide later on and whatever happens next will no doubt encourage her decision one way or the other. Or she could just be here, which she is. (*TWB* p. 242)

The point is not to stress Katherine’s role as an unreliable narrator, but to make the broader implication that there is rarely any other kind. The self concept is partly structured by the reasons people give for doing what they do. Damasio (1995; 2000) argues that reason cannot be abstracted from affective processes; that the way one feels influences what one does, even if one is unaware of this influence. An action based on affective processes which themselves have no identifiable cause remains unmotivated. Damasio writes,

We do not need to be conscious of the inducer of an emotion and often are not, and we cannot control emotions wilfully. You may find yourself in a sad or happy state, and yet [...] may be at a loss as to why you are in that state now. A careful search may disclose possible causes, and one cause or another may be more likely, but often you cannot be certain. [...] ⁶⁶

This ‘careful search’ is an introspective consideration of a synthesis: what happens influences how I feel about what happens, which influences what happens next; but if the cause of the emotion, which emotion prompted behaviour, was nonconscious, then there is no

⁶⁶ Damasio, *What Happens* p. 47

way of recovering the cause and thereby knowing why one does what one does with certainty. Katherine's scepticism, then, is entirely sensible. She is detached from motivation because she understands the complexity of these relations and the improbability of her ever being able to know them completely, which renders the 'truth' of her actions ultimately unknowable.

In the absence of conscious access to the true causes of their behaviour, people routinely confabulate – and believe in their own confabulations. In discussing human agency, John Doris (2014) and Daniel Wegner (2002) both consider experiments in which respondents give reasons for having acting as they did, unaware that their behaviour was motivated by unconscious prompts. Doris calls these unconscious prompts 'defeaters' and goes so far as to suggest that not knowing the true and precise cause of our actions divests us of agency. 'If the presence of defeaters cannot be confidently ruled out for a particular behaviour, it is not justified to attribute the actor an exercise of agency.'⁶⁷

Nonetheless, humans need to find – and *present* – reasons for doing what they do, and whether these reasons are precise or not is almost beside the point. Without an explanatory framework through which to understand our behaviour, it is impossible to explain ourselves to ourselves and others. If I cannot give a reason for having done what I have done, how can I integrate that experience into a coherent story of myself? This is an essential aspect of social orientation, but Katherine seems intuitively distrustful of the instinct to account for her actions with any kind of certainty, and Doris and Wegner seem to legitimise her wariness. Katherine is unusually content with deciding that she does not know why she does what she does, and, equally unusual, she has no problem admitting this to herself. This does not result in any instability or panic around the lack of agency Doris would attribute to her, as she

⁶⁷ John M. Doris, *Talking to Ourselves* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 44

circumvents such instability by focussing on the fact that she *is*: '[...] or she could just be here, which she is.' Katherine focusses on the self – her perspective and locus of experience, the simple fact that she exists – in order to stabilise the *instability* of her conceptual self.

TWB was motivated by a distrust of the efficacy of introspection to 'truthfully' delineate motivation. Of course, there is a richness in describing even the misguided peregrinations of a character's psychology, but *TWB* aims, albeit obliquely, to criticise an authorial tendency to present a characters' thought processes uncritically. That is, to present thought processes and the motivations they structure without challenging either the characters' or the narrator's capacity to 'truthfully' elucidate these processes. The narrator of *TWB* does not try to analyse Katherine, and she does not try to analyse herself. When she does, the conclusions she draws are necessarily equivocal, but the *tone* of her equivocation is one of acceptance, not disturbance. The way *TWB* presents it, not knowing why we do what we do need not be problematic. The fact that it often *is* problematic allows for an unusual tension to arise. Being unable to *account* for Katherine challenges our instinct to try, and Katherine's casual response to constructing such meaningful interpretations renders her at once admirable and disturbing. *TWB* presents a character who consistently knows as much as the narrator knows, which, in the case of psychological motivation, is that the cause of behaviour could be one thing or another. Such democratic equivocation consistently undermines the impetus of a psychologically motivated fiction. Typically, *what happens influences how a person feels about what happens, which influences what happens next*. This framework scaffolds behaviour and the reasons we give for it, while also offering a blueprint for the way psychological fictions can be structured. Katherine's subtle interrogations of herself can be extrapolated as an oblique interrogation of the very novel in which she exists.

2. The Story of the Self

2.1. Strawson's 'Four Types' of Self

What Strawson (2004) calls 'the psychological Narrativity thesis' is the widespread contention that organising the conceptual self in narrative terms is a natural way of being in the world (for arguments along these lines, see Sacks, 1985; Bruner, 2004; Schechtman, 1997). Nelson suggests that 'a specific kind of memory emerges at the end of the pre-school period' that enables the subject to organise its relationship with society in such a way that its experiential selfhood is contextualised in storied terms, and that these processes are encouraged within 'social interactions that focus on the telling and retelling of significant life events.'⁶⁸ The very act of remembering is 'modulated by [...] sociocultural models.'⁶⁹ We 'turn our life experiences into stories, and our continually changing selves into sets of more or less fixed attributes, attitudes and identities.'⁷⁰ This iteration of the conceptual self is an astonishing display of ingenuity. Indeed, Bruner suggests that, 'A self is probably the most impressive work of art we ever produce.'⁷¹ Katherine's awareness of the constructed nature of the self concept lends a note of cynicism to Bruner's celebratory assertion: 'She understands very clearly what a compelling work of art she is.' (TWB, p. 198) Katherine's statement briefly reflects on the ingenuity of those structures to which, for the most part, she pays scant attention.

Bruner suggests 'one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative

⁶⁸ Katherine Nelson, *Young Minds in Social Worlds: Experience, Meaning, and Memory* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 185

⁶⁹ R. Fivush, T. Habermas, T. E. A. Waters, and W. Zaman, 'The Making of Autobiographical Memory: Intersections of Culture, Narratives and Identity' in, *International Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 46, No. 5 (2011) p. 322

⁷⁰ Lynne Cameron and Diane Larsen-Freeman, 'Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics' in, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 17, Issue 2 (2007) pp. 226-239 p. 226

⁷¹ Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) p. 14

models it makes available for describing the course of a life.’⁷² The culture in which one is embedded will largely determine the shape of one’s life-narrative. An interesting extension of the argument (and a very *Lispectorish* circularity) is that even when a subject rejects the narrative models the culture makes available, the culture shifts to accommodate such rebellious narratives. If one decides to reject or ‘drop out’ of ‘the system’, then ‘the system’ will characterise one (as one characterises oneself) as exterior and antithetical to it. One can be defined by what one rejects.

By situating these ideas within narrative theories of the self, with an emphasis on Strawson’s ‘four-types’ theory of the narrative self (2004, 2007), the following section considers the way Katherine chooses to either integrate her experiences within broader narrative structures, or to analyse and detach from the same. The chapter consistently stresses Katherine’s psychological acuity, her understanding that she can, if she wishes, use stories of the self to orientate, as this lends a peculiar freedom to her choice *not* to integrate her experiences in this way.

Strawson (2004; 2007) outlines four basic *types* of self: Narrative and Non-Narrative; Diachronic and Episodic. To be a Narrative self is ‘to see or live or experience one’s life as a narrative or story of some sort, or at least as a collection of stories.’ This type of self is paired with a Diachronic conception, where the current, experiential self is felt as something ‘that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future.’⁷³ Strawson suggests that Diachronic types recognise a strong sense of continuity between the present experiential self and the past experiential self. This facilitates a Narrative conception of the self, where the story of the self is the organisation of that sense of continuity. This process involves,

⁷² Jerome Bruner, ‘Life as a Narrative’ in, *Social Research*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (2004) pp. 691-710 p. 694 Hereafter, *Bruner, Narrative*

⁷³ *Strawson, Ethics* p. 86

‘understanding one’s life as a narrative and enacting the narrative one sees as one’s life.’⁷⁴ To reinstate the distinction between self and self concept, the Narrative / Diachronic type integrates the self (the locus of experience) into a narrative conception of its own consistency. It thereby formulates a coherent and sustained self concept in storied terms. The term *narrative* in the present context refers to what Marya Schechtman identifies as, ‘not just a sequential listing of one’s life events, but also an account of the explanatory relations among them – a story of how the events in one’s history lead to other events in the history.’⁷⁵ What happens influences how one feels about what happens, which influences what happens next. To articulate this process is to formulate a conceptual self in storied terms.

The Narrative / Diachronic pairing is contrasted with the Non-Narrative and Episodic sense of self. Non-Narrative types ‘may simply lack any narrative tendency,’ while the Episodic conception of the self is one in which ‘one does not figure oneself, the self or person one now experiences oneself to be as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future.’⁷⁶ The Non-Narrative / Episodic self is a self which does not organise its experiences in narrative terms, and which does not experience the present, phenomenological self, or ‘self*’, as Strawson distinguishes it⁷⁷ - a distinction the thesis will borrow – as something that was there in the past.

There are a number of issues to unpack here. Firstly, when Strawson says that a subject who tends towards the Narrative / Diachronic type considers their life as a narrative, does one not have to ask: *when?* Strawson’s notion that some people are inherently Narrative

⁷⁴ Schechtman, *Narrative Self* p. 395

⁷⁵ Marya Schechtman, ‘Stories, Lives, and Basic Survival’ in, Daniel D. Hutto (ed.) *Narrative and Understanding Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 155-178 p. 159 p. 160

⁷⁶ Strawson, *Ethics* p. 86

⁷⁷ Lynne Rudder Baker uses the same designation: ‘The first-person perspective is, well, first-personal; it is the perspective from which one thinks of oneself as oneself* without the aid of any third-person name, description, demonstrative or other referential device.’ Lynne Rudder Baker, ‘Naturalism and the First-Person Perspective’ in, Georg Gasser (ed.), *How Successful is Naturalism?* (Frankfurt: Ontos-Verlag, 2007) p. 203

and some Episodic seems too neat a distinction to make, given the fluidity and ease with which we switch our attention from the self as an ongoing story to the self as an exclusively present, experiential entity, to an experience of the world from which any coherently formulated conception of the self is entirely absent. Nonetheless, Strawson insists that when he looks inside *himself*, he feels no attachment at all to the experiential self in the (further) past. Strawson of course understands that the history of Galen Strawson *belongs* to him, he just feels no special attachment to it. This means that for Strawson emotions such as shame and embarrassment, which largely depend for their potency on a powerfully recalled continuity between past experiential self and present experiential self, are less potent or entirely absent (2007). While challenges to this argument suggest that such a detachment from self* must entail a diminished sense of moral responsibility (see Stokes, 2010), Strawson contends that this is not the case (2007), and in my own novel, Katherine's attitude towards her past actions leaves her, provocatively, somewhere between these two arguments.

A Non-narrative / Episodic experience of selfhood nonetheless requires the subject's capacity to infer a relationship between itself and its world. This is the process through which selves *are*. Damasio suggests the self is 'the first answer to a question the organism never posed: To whom do these ongoing mental processes now unfolding belong?' ⁷⁸ The organism recognises those processes as belonging to it, and thereby recognises itself as the bearer of experience. Lispector frames the same idea: '[...] the answer had imposed itself upon me since I was born. Because of this continual answer I, the wrong way round, had been forced to seek to corresponding question.' (*The Passion*, p. 139). G.H. cannot formulate the question before she has the answer, because she is the answer needed to frame the question.

Another way of phrasing this is to suggest that the self is born into a context, and as it

⁷⁸ Damasio, *What Happens* pp. 25-6

recognises the context as belonging to itself, the 'I' is generated; it is then sustained and organised by telling this context to itself and others. The self is thereby elaborated into the self concept. Strawson's Non-Narrative / Episodic self, however, is intuitively disinclined to perform this act of elaboration in a way that the self concept develops as a coherent story. It is perfectly possible for this interpretive process to remain intact, for there to *be* an experiential self, without that process proliferating into broader narrative structures. So one can install a subtle caveat to Strawson's Non-Narrative self, and suggest that this second theoretical type exemplifies a self with normative inferential capacities that do not cohere in a typical – narrative – way.

Damasio (2000) rejects narrative conceptions of the self partly on the basis that it is possible for a subject with severe brain damage to maintain a sense of self (that is, to know that these experiences are happening *to me*) while having no access to either short or long-term memory. This seems to disavow the notion that the self *is* narrative, as such subjects know themselves to *be* themselves, even though that sense of self is not couched within and elaborated by a story of themselves as an enduring and stable entity with a past and a future. The above caveat to Strawson's four-types schematic goes some way to defusing this argument. Even without short or long-term memory, the existence of an experiential self is still the result of an interpretive process; it is a result of the instinct to infer a relationship between things and the experience of them. This innate capacity, this narrative instinct, is the same capacity by which selves *are*. This goes some way to explaining the prevalence of storytelling across all cultures.

The narrative instinct encourages humans to infer causal relations even where none are present,⁷⁹ and explains the ease with which subjects interpret even entirely novel forms of

⁷⁹ Attribution theory, beginning with Fritz Heider (1958), analyses this capacity, suggesting that we infer causal relations between disparate things and events and even impose psychological motivation on completely

artistic expression, as is evidenced, for example, by the way early audiences understood the emerging codes and grammar of the cinema.⁸⁰ The ability to infer relationships and analyse the results of that synthesis is surely among the most crucial, flexible and outstanding capacities humans possess and is a foundational capacity for both the production of art and the interpretation of it. We infer stories – intentional narratives – based on the simplest of relationships. As Edouard Leve writes, ‘If events follow each other, they are believed to be a story.’⁸¹ The self is the first story: ‘selves create stories, and stories create selves.’⁸² It is not that storytelling exists and we need to explain why and how humans indulge in the practice; rather, *selves exist*, and selves are already the result of an interpretive process. As humans turn this capacity out to the world, stories naturally proliferate.

Those naturally inclined towards a Non-Narrative / Diachronic experience of selfhood – or those with certain severe neurological disorders – simply do not elaborate the narrative instinct into broader structures. This distinction is important for an analysis of Katherine, which makes clear that her beingness is consistently emphasised. She knows herself to exist and is therefore a self like all others. The instinct which makes that self possible, however, does not cohere along narrative lines.

The Non-Narrative self, so adjusted, represents the curtailment of that instinct to elaborate upon itself, to incorporate everything it encounters into the ongoing narrative of the self. The philosophy motivating *TWB* contends that this instinct ordinarily compels a subject

inanimate processes. In order to navigate sensibly through life, it seems essential to find *reasons* for things happening as they do. Such ‘reasons’, of course, are stories; they are examples of the narrative instinct at work, as they are the result of an inferred relationship between things. See also, Bertram F. Malle, ‘Attribution Theories: How People Make Sense of Behavior’ in, D. Chadee (ed.), *Theories in Social Psychology* (London: Blackwell, 2011) pp. 72-95

⁸⁰ In *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) Edward Porter cut from one sequence of events to an entirely different sequence. The immediate proximity of these sequences encouraged the audience to infer a relationship between them, and they made the inference with ease. *This* relates to *that*. Parallel action was born, and the cinema attained its opposable thumb.

⁸¹ Edouard Leve, *Suicide*, trans. by Jan Steyn (London: The Dalkey Archive, 2011) (p. 34)

⁸² Dan McAdams and Kate C. McLean, ‘Narrative Identity’ in, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (June, 2013) pp. 233-238 p. 235

to enfold its experiences into a broader, narrative, context, and that this process provides an account of the conceptual self, but that it simultaneously limits as it defines. Sections 2.2. and 2.3. demonstrate that it is perfectly possible *not* to exercise the instinct to organise experiences into broader structures and thereby expend the instinct to account for them. Such an attitude is captured through Metzinger's off-hand definition of 'spirituality', which he defines as 'seeing what *is* – letting go of the need for emotional security.'⁸³

If the self is born of the instinct to interpret, then it is no surprise that instantiating that instinct provides 'emotional security'. This is, after all, the instinct through which the self *is*. *TWB* encourages the abandonment of the instinct to enfold experience into a comforting narrative, even when the inability or refusal to do so results in emotional insecurity. Jancsó asserts that, 'Storytelling is an evasion.'⁸⁴ Storytelling evades what *is* in its attempt to *explain* what is, and the rest of this chapter uses Katherine's relationship with the potential narrative structures of her own self to demonstrate that such structures are largely arbitrary, in the sense that although their construction is contingent on the events which inform them, no one narrative is inevitable; it is always up to the subject which narrative to choose. Of course, 'finding your own story' can (and is) itself presented as a liberative exercise, but the purpose of Katherine and the novel more broadly is to suggest that a *more* liberative approach to the self is to let go of story altogether; a profoundly Buddhist view of the self and one's ability to relinquish any attachment to it. Despite these reservations regarding the definitive nature of Strawson's distinctions, his four-types schematic lends itself very powerfully to an analysis of Katherine's relationship with herself.

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⁸³ Metzinger, *Ego* p. 211

⁸⁴ Miklós Jancsó, *The Denial of Oppression* ><http://www.kinoeye.org/03/03/hames03.php>< [accessed September 9th, 2018]

Humans are not constantly astonished by the phenomenology of selfhood – the strange realisation that we *are* – though *TWB* presents a character who *is* astonished by this fact on an inordinately regular basis. This forms the backbone of Katherine’s ethical worldview. By emphasising the importance of the story of the self, one emphasises a concept that is eminently changeable. One’s ‘life story’ represents a complex sequence of psychological machinations that enable the self to orientate and motivate its behaviours and responses. Katherine plays out the novel’s motivating philosophy: that the stories we tell about ourselves, while offering solace, inclusion, and comfort, limit as they proliferate; the stories we tell about ourselves blind us to a powerful truth, namely, *Your story has no impact on your value as a human being*. Quite what ‘value’ we put on that is of course up for debate, and the ambiguities inherent in Katherine’s behaviour are there to elicit the question.

TWB’s focus represents a shift from ‘being yourself’ to simply *being*. The novel’s structure composes a narrative where people from Katherine’s past interrupt her present; where paths cross and coincidences abound, while Katherine largely refuses to engage with these developments. She refuses to integrate the plot – *what happens* – with her emotional state, to allow the latter to compel future developments; she disengages from the process of ‘worlding the story’ (Herman, 2013) in such a way that the experiential self – the simple fact that she *is* – is overwhelmed and subsumed by the story by which it is surrounded.⁸⁵

2.2. Katherine as a Response to Dostoevsky

The self concept is shaped by an array of influencing factors so bewildering that, to most of

⁸⁵ Jean-Philippe Toussaint considers this distinction between the stories one tells to explain oneself and the contrasting, though often simultaneous, realisation that we simply *are* as a shift from *living* to *being*, a shift that, for Toussaint, has a decidedly existential air: ‘[...] you move from the struggle of living to the despair of being.’ Jean-Philippe Toussaint, *Camera*, trans. by Matthew B. Smith (Dublin: The Dalkey Archive, 2008) p. 83

us, the story seems to form itself, that is, the story feels ‘true’ *because it is forming*. As story begins to proliferate, as Katherine’s narrative instinct *does* begin to integrate her experiences into a coherent narrative structure, she experiences a moment of panic:

She thinks of interview rooms and court transcripts, things that once unloosed bind her among themselves, and it seems so unlikely that one simple gesture- the dropping of a hatchet, knocking on a door- can unloose a narrative over which she no longer has any control. It is overwhelming for a moment. (*TWB*, p. 214)

However, Katherine has the capacity to step back from these self-proliferating structures and to see that the narrative that feels as though it is forming around her does not really exist. ‘She breathes. The sky is there and nothing else is, none of the things she is thinking about.’ (*TWB*, p. 214)

The above passage and its neutralising rejoinder (‘there is nothing else here’) demonstrate Katherine’s ability to step back from the instinct to incorporate her experiences into a coherent, storied self. Being past, the novel’s events no longer *exist*, not the way the sky does, or the trees around her. Katherine therefore has a choice: to integrate the past into an analysis of it, or to detach entirely, to maintain herself as distinct from the events unfolding around her; to thereby uncouple the self from the story that might otherwise shape her self concept. Katherine demonstrates an ability to engage with and disengage from a narrative conception of the self at will.

In Part Two, Bob’s son, Kyle, confronts Katherine in Brighton. Her response to this, “‘You should forgive me, Kyle. It will be easier for you.’” (*TWB*, p. 145) is both true and insensitive. Katherine assumes Kyle has the capacity to detach from the past self*, a self on which he depends to fuel his anger. Katherine imagines in Kyle this fluctuation between a Narrative / Diachronic sense of self and a Non-Narrative / Episodic:

It is amusing. That he has managed, somehow, to stay bound to a motive, clear enough to him, for long enough that he could get the trains all the way to Brighton.

Maybe he sat on the stones this afternoon, took his socks off, let the breakers fizz across his toes. Maybe he thought, *This is ridiculous*. And then he gathered it all together again. He rehearsed the mechanics. *She did this, and so I will do that. Something will be balanced. I will feel better.* (TWB, p. 145)

If the self who experienced the emotions compelling him to confront Katherine does not exist, then those emotions evaporate, and his motives evaporate with it. There is no point to the confrontation. This is evidently the way Katherine experiences the world. Her sense of forgiveness seems limitless. For instance, she is attacked in Part One, and when she sees her attacker again much later in the novel, she approaches and asks him for a favour, without the barest suggestion that she harbours any ill-will towards him (part three, chapter six).

However, is this *really* a demonstration of ‘forgiveness’? Katherine does not forgive ‘the boy’ after an evaluation of her emotional response and a deliberate attempt to dissolve her resentment or anger in the neutralising power of forgiveness; instead, she does not seem to recognise the interpretive dynamic that gives forgiveness its efficacy. If she feels no attachment to the past experiential self, then there is no resentment, and so there is nothing to forgive. This manifests as a radical equality: she judges no one, and nothing anyone does to her has any lasting emotional power, but it is not a loving gesture, as conventionally understood. When Debbie is talking to her about forgiveness it is clear Katherine has no use of the concept. Once again, the novel brings out the unsettling ambiguity of Katherine’s character. Having realised that for Katherine the very idea of forgiveness is transformed, Debbie remarks, “‘It’s a strange kind of equality [...]. But I’m not sure it’s any real kind of love.’” (TWB, p. 118)

Katherine is not free of regret (the Episodic self ‘can rightly regret things one has done without any special experience of remorse or contrition’⁸⁶), though she feels no need to integrate the experience of regret into a story about her past self, a story to which she might

⁸⁶ Strawson, *Ethics* p. 91

feel so attached she experiences shame or remorse, *and is then compelled to tell a story explaining why*, which story might otherwise motivate her future behaviour. With no need for this dynamic, when she thinks about the attack on Bob, she concludes, simply, that she ‘would rather it hadn’t happened’ (*TWB*, p. 247), a line that very purposefully recalls Meursault’s response to his mother’s death in Camus’ *The Outsider*: ‘The only thing I could say for certain was that I had rather mother hadn’t died.’⁸⁷ Meursault is considered somehow inhuman for this unemotional response to his mother’s death, though Katherine’s own response to the attack on Bob allows one to suggest that such responses to the harmful behaviours of the past free Katherine from the sort of confused, constraining emotional turmoil that motivates Kyle. Further, if, as section 1.3. suggested, the ‘real’ reasons for our behaviour can never be known with certainty, then Meursault’s analytical restraint demonstrates a scrupulous honesty mirrored by Katherine’s response to her own past actions.

TWB’s treatment of the self was highly influenced by a series of Dostoevsky novels which systematically challenge the notion of a consistent self through protagonists determined to rid themselves of the self-defining narrative by which they are surrounded. *Demons*, *Crime and Punishment*, and *Notes from Underground* can all be read as interrogations of the conceptual self, and Katherine can be seen as a result of these struggles; a response to the unresolved frustrations of Stavrogin, Raskolnikov and the underground man. In a sense, Katherine starts where they leave off.

For Dostoevsky, the instinct towards a dissolution of the self springs from the Christian ideal of overcoming the ‘I’, ‘to [...] annihilate the I, to give it wholly to each and to everyone.’⁸⁸ Dostoevsky’s fascination with *kenosis*, a form of ‘self-emptying that can free us from selfishness and manipulative pride so that we can treat others in loving and tender

⁸⁷ Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, trans. by Joseph Laredo (London: Penguin, 1983) p. 65

⁸⁸ Quoted in, George Santayana, *Dostoevsky: The Author as Psychoanalyst* (London: Routledge, 2017) p. 118

ways'⁸⁹ illuminates the soulful struggles of his protagonists in their attempts to disrupt and detach from the conceptual selves by which they are defined, though the path to salvation is routinely barred by the emergence of nihilism and its antithetical individualism. Stavrogin (*Demons*) and Raskolnikov (*Crime and Punishment*) struggle with the self in a battle with the intersubjectively, socially reformulated story of the self as a rational, atheistic individual, a conception of the self that clarifies with the rise of nihilism among the generation of the 1840s. The struggle of Dostoevsky's protagonists represents a dislocation from a sociohistorical story of the self rooted in Russian Orthodoxy. The resultant tension, a 'metaphysical homelessness' (Harper, 1967), is further elaborated by Foucault (1970) who saw the rise of industrialisation as a radical undermining of the synergy between 'man and nature'. Disturbing this historical co-dependency leads to a schism which means that 'the man who appears at the beginning of the nineteenth century is 'dehistoricised''.⁹⁰

TWB itself is a purposefully 'dehistoricised' novel. The action takes place in a generalised 'now', given a superficial depth by the interweaving of timelines separating an unspecified past from an unspecified present, adding a distance that is, in the end, collapsed: the novel is circular, with the final chapter of 'then' leading, chronologically, into the opening chapter of 'now'.⁹¹ Michael Holquist (1977) uses this basic idea of a dehistoricised self – a self without a stable story – in his analyses of Dostoevsky's major protagonists. The

⁸⁹ Kevin Aho, 'Guignon on Self-Surrender and Homelessness in Dostoevsky and Heidegger' in, Hans Pederson and Megan Altman (eds.), *Horizons of Authenticity in Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Moral Psychology: Essays in Honor of Charles Guignon* (New York: Springer, 2014) p. 302

⁹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970) p. 369

⁹¹ A rare mention of contemporary culture comes in Katherine's brief attempt to write a Facebook profile (*TWB*, p 96). A self structured by social media is, of course, a radically dehistoricised self; such a self depends for its temporal depth on the *existence* of social media, which only goes back a handful of years. A typical timeline might be reasonably rich with photos, posts and events until a date – some small number of years prior – when the user joined Facebook, after which there is a gap followed by a birthdate, as though the time between birth and joining Facebook is a time out of time, at least for the system which structures and organises the online self. Although Katherine does not readily engage with social media, she is not cynical of it either. She sees the *use* of Facebook in 'clarify[ing] yourself to yourself' (*TWB*, p. 96), though she clearly sees the attempt to clarify a storied self concept as weightless.

rise of a radical intelligentsia and political extremism in mid-to-late nineteenth century Russia (a period de Jonge (1975) calls ‘the age of intensity’), undermines any systems of truth upon which Dostoevsky’s protagonists can orientate. With the disruption of Orthodoxy, the stable sociocultural *narrative* of the collective self is thrown into doubt. Dostoevsky’s protagonists struggle to formulate their own conceptual selves without this stabilising narrative, and Holquist argues that the underground man, particularly, exists within this turbulently decentred *being*:

There was something out there that was *true* and events could be referred back to whatever it was [...] for a valid order of reckoning. The underground man cannot find a way to order events because there is no ground to which he can refer them, [...] there is *no* order he will not bring himself to question.⁹²

For the underground man there is no ‘historical sense of self.’⁹³ Holquist considers the role of plot in rationalising the story of the self: ‘[...] we begin by assuming the tale *has* a unity, and further that it is defined by its chronology in such a way that any *other* order will appear irrational.’⁹⁴ The underground man’s rejection of the formula $2 \times 2 = 4$ can be seen as a rejection of the principle of order – the story – that no longer has the power to orientate the self in a rational way.⁹⁵

The interweaving of the timelines in *TWB* can be viewed in this light as a slight and subtle undermining of chronology, a metaphorical expression of Katherine’s lack of self concept. The underground man is committed to destabilising the story of the self, and that novel ends inconclusively; the woman he torments, Liza, simply walks away from him. Later novels resume this destabilised story of the self and confront a central, perplexing paradox, a

⁹² Michael Holquist, *Dostoevsky and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) p. 54 Hereafter, *Holquist*

⁹³ *Holquist*, p. 55

⁹⁴ *Holquist*, p. 55

⁹⁵ ‘I agree that two and two make four is an excellent thing; but to give everything its due, two and two make five is also a very fine thing.’ *Dostoevsky, Notes* p. 41

paradox Lispector's G.H. revisits. If one detaches from the structures that enable one to talk about the self, then how does one formulate a description of the self that remains? In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov presents an abstruse, Nietzschean theory as motive for killing the pawnbroker and her sister but this *superman* theory (that the genius should be allowed to overstep morality in expressing, unbounded, his or her greatness) is introduced strangely late in the narrative (part three, chapter five), and even Raskolnikov seems unconvinced. The suggestion here is that Raskolnikov committed the murders in an attempt to liberate himself from the story of himself, to overstep the explanatory bounds that keep that story intact; to perform an act *without any explanation* in an attempt to detach from the self concept altogether. The difficulty of such a motive lies in those very paradoxes which comprise the endlessly rephrased circularities of *The Passion*. As soon as people begin pressing Raskolnikov for an explanation for the murders, he feels compelled to offer some, not only to satisfy the demands of others and their need for explanatory coherence – for a story than can contain and therefore, at least partly, neutralise the horror of the act – but because the self from which he is attempting to detach follows him across the divide. Such a self needs to orientate, to tell itself to itself. Raskolnikov lacks the reassuring insistence on his experiential selfhood that enabled Katherine to accept that she often does not know why she does what she does. Raskolnikov committed murder for no reason, and this lack of reasoning constitutes his reasoning; it produces a rupture in the story of the self concept, which enables him to detach from it. However, to express this motive, to insist that there are no reasons, creates an aporia that cannot be sustained. Raskolnikov cannot accept or confront his *real* motivation, as to do so would be to accept its impossibility and consign him to impotence.

One could suggest that Raskolnikov's guilt and confusion, and his persistent theorising, even though he bitterly rejects whatever rationale he can muster, suggest that he experiences a Narrative / Diachronic self, but that he spends the novel trying to detach

himself from this. He is trying to be a Non-Narrative / Episodic self, and failing. Forced to account for himself, Raskolnikov has no choice but to enter back into frameworks that begin to reconstruct a sense of his identity. He finally confesses to Sonia, “‘I killed myself, not the old crone.’”⁹⁶ As Holquist points out, ‘the man who murdered the pawnbroker *in that act* got rid of the self Raskolnikov conceived himself to be before the act of murder.’⁹⁷ The problem is what to do with, and how to formulate, the self that remains.

Similarly, Stavrogin uses his politics to shape a sense of identity, not to foment a revolution in which he truly believes, but in order to clarify a self from which he can then detach. Stavrogin has, at the novel’s open, discarded the identity he worked so hard to develop. The problem with Stavrogin, just as with Raskolnikov, is that he does not know what to *do* with his ‘liberation’ from the self. This renders him angry, impotent and aimless. Finally, he kills himself. Both Stavrogin and Raskolnikov commit terrible deeds, and both present motives for their behaviour based on ideologies they bitterly reject even as they espouse them, meaning that their true motivation remains opaque.

The Dostoevsky novel is consistently characterised by a large and disparate ensemble of characters, and the climaxes punctuating the novels often arise from tumultuous and overlapping conversations in an almost overwhelmingly large gathering. Yuri Corrigan (2017) suggests this polyphonic strategy means that ‘the boundaries between selves seem fluid and apparently non-binding.’⁹⁸ Conflicting with Dostoevsky’s professed faithfulness to psychological realism, it often seems as though the polyphonic nature of his texts makes of its disparate cast one voice, a singular stirring towards the redemptive promise of a return to Russian Orthodoxy. Berdyaev (2011) certainly saw in the Dostoevsky novel one conception

⁹⁶ Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, p. 420

⁹⁷ Holquist, p. 88

⁹⁸ Yuri Corrigan, *Dostoevsky and the Riddle of the Self* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017) p. 3
Hereafter, *Corrigan*

of wo/man played out in a long and intersecting tragedy throughout the novels, ‘a single human spirit, revealed from different sides and various moments of its path.’⁹⁹ These ‘feverishly intersecting personalities’ elucidate for Corrigan ‘the foundational riddle of Dostoevsky’s writing [...] his simultaneous advocacy for and rejection of an individual self.’¹⁰⁰ Stavrogin’s struggle against nihilism can be framed as a battle to dissolve the rational will in order that the self can meld once more into a harmonious dissolution of the I. The dialogic nature of the novels, then, positions all of Dostoevsky’s major texts on the precipice of this merging. Todorov, too, saw this instinct in Dostoevsky, claiming that he (Dostoevsky) ‘rejects an essentialist conception of man’¹⁰¹ and conceives of the self as a purely intersubjective phenomena, as though the novels keep this swirling, intersubjective polyphony afloat before the protagonists attain redemption in the dissolution of the I, or die: ‘The human being has no existence prior to the other or independent of him.’¹⁰²

Reinforcing the contradiction Corrigan remarks upon, Bakhtin, contra Todorov and Berdyaev, saw this polyphony of voices in the Dostoevsky novel not as representative of a single, many-faceted yearning towards spiritual fulfilment, but as a unique plurality of wholly independent selves, ‘a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of [the] Dostoevsky novel.’¹⁰³ Other critics have remarked that Dostoevsky’s ability to give forceful voice to such disparate and conflicting ideals is perhaps the chief mark of his greatness and psychological acuity.

For Dostoevsky, one can struggle against the prevailing narrative of the self, but

⁹⁹ Nicolas A. Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, trans. by Donald Attwater (Montana: Literary Licencing LLC, 2011) p. 17

¹⁰⁰ Corrigan, p. 3

¹⁰¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p. 89 Hereafter, *Todorov*

¹⁰² Todorov, p. 89

¹⁰³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. by C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) p. 6

ultimate liberation requires the self to re-establish a connection with the story that prevailing narrative has usurped; the story of spiritual fulfilment framed in Orthodox terms. Any failure to achieve this results in despair or, in the case of the underground man, rejection. The apparent contradiction Corrigan identifies – the advocacy of individualism with a simultaneous rejection of the individual self – can be squared by the belief that the individual is free *as* an individual to strive against nihilism, against pride and Ego, in order to attain faith and salvation, which brings a harmonious dissolution of the struggles that defined the self trying to attain it. Further, this process occurs intersubjectively, it plays out in the overlapping conversations that structure the novels. The self is intersubjective, but it requires an individualism to synthesise these intersubjective voices into a force aimed towards salvation. The tonally jarring Epilogue of *Crime and Punishment* suddenly makes sense. The kenosis of Christian Orthodoxy offers, in salvation, the dissolution of the self that Raskolnikov attempted to force. It offers a story, an explanatory framework, though Raskolnikov's acceptance of it is a result of his surrender, rather than outright conversion. He relinquishes the self a changing society defines through Nietzschean theories of the will in order to embrace a oneness with God, though this oneness remains a reconfigured, narrative conception of the self. A. D. Nuttall draws the same conclusion:

The story of *Crime and Punishment* now becomes the story not of a man's descent into hell and rebirth into glory, but of a failure. Raskolnikov tried to be free, but was sucked back into the mire of ethics and all the complex apparatus assembled by the church for the diminution of humanity.¹⁰⁴

The 'mire' and 'complex apparatus' Nuttall speaks of are the context of a story into which Raskolnikov transitions. Raskolnikov has slipped from one story to another, and the self that is Raskolnikov is at the centre of both. If he killed the women to discard motive and

¹⁰⁴ A. D. Nuttall, *Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment: Murder As Philosophic Experiment* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1978) p. 65

reasons in an effort to frustrate the story that defines and shapes a coherent self concept, then the project was a failure. He merely resumes a new self concept, and any attempt to liberate himself from the locus of experience altogether is frustrated for the same reasons G.H.'s detachment is likewise curtailed.

Conversely, Katherine begins in a place of detachment and relative emotional stability that neither G.H. nor Stavrogin nor Raskolnikov are ever able to attain. These novels suggested a confrontation with the self concept which motivated *TWB*, but *TWB* learns the lessons of Raskolnikov's frustrations and finally responds to this confrontation with the self by disengaging from it. Katherine does not try to prove to herself or anyone else that she has forsaken her self concept, and nor does she need the orientating 'story' of oneness in Christ to stabilise the lack-of-self she demonstrates. Rather, she has an apparently placid lack of self concept from the beginning, and a concomitant commitment to the experiential self, which does not need the orientating frameworks of a conceptual self to stabilise. When Katherine is asked to explain herself, unlike Raskolnikov, she does not take the bait.

2.3. Detaching from the Self concept

In part three, Katherine reflects on her part in the attack on Bob. She considers 'the dropping of a hatchet' (*TWB*, p. 214) and admires the way this 'simple' gesture creates its own narrative. The attack causes a train of repercussions, but Katherine can distance herself from these repercussions and simply admire the concatenation of these causal relationships. She does not interpret these events and draw conclusions about the sort of person she must be. Things still happen, and they still cause other things to happen, but Katherine does not allow events to be enfolded within a story of her conceptual self. She privileges, once again, the self over the self concept. That Katherine has the capacity to even ponder these choices means

that she feels little fear, worry or concern for the narrative unfurling around her as she refuses, after this brief reflection, to emotionally engage with these frameworks.

This certainly seems to attest to a lack of moral responsibility, because her reaction to the typical emotional and psychological structures resulting from such violent acts is not considered as something necessary, nor something to which she is inextricably bound. She is free, and she stays that way. But this does not disable Katherine from responding to her behaviour in a way that *she* deigns appropriate. She confronts Bob and faces up to what she did to him; she just refuses to ‘pay for her actions’ through the route that society demands, and the route society demands is one which depends, for its potency, on a Diachronic and Narrative conception of the self, where the subject responds to events through a close sense of continuity with their past experiential self. Disturb this mechanism and the results certainly look, at first glance, like a lack of moral responsibility, but the novel is arguing that, though atypical, Katherine is not amoral.

Katherine’s visit to Bob (in part two, chapter thirteen) does, however, demonstrate a brief lapse in her consideration of others. She approaches Bob because she understands that this is the right thing to do; to apologise. But the gesture itself is enough for Katherine, and she briefly forgets that not everyone is able to detach so fluently from the motivating schematic of the narrative self.

She has the feeling that this has already been done, that whatever she came here to do or say has already finished, and she interrupts herself walking towards him as though to leave. He steps back. She pauses. She has left him behind. How to get him to the place where it has all already finished? (*TWB*, p. 186)

Katherine is not trying to atone for her behaviour but to liberate Bob from the constraining dynamics of a narrative that might seek to define him; to liberate him from the dynamics that would call for such atonement in the first place. And she succeeds. She stays the night. He makes her breakfast. The next day, he changes his story in court. What is the

point, the implication goes, in his testifying against Katherine and having her thrown in jail? The retributive instinct evaporates with the conceptual self. Just as with Katherine, Bob does not overcome his anger and dissolve it with forgiveness. Rather, he realises there is nothing to forgive in the first place. This is not to deny the pain and trauma of human experience – ‘There is no doubt about it. Things happen.’ (*TWB*, p. 188) – rather, it is to emphasise the constraining nature of the stories with which one integrates these ‘things happening’, and to encourage a detachment from them as emotionally liberative.

In rehab, Katherine writes about her experiences, and when Len misunderstands her motive for doing so, Katherine offers the reader perhaps the first insight into her belief in the ‘evasive’ nature of self-interpretation.

“You are trying to make sense of what happened,” he says.

“No,” she says.

“What then?”

“It’s not the story that matters.”

“So what matters?”

She obscures truth by making sense of these things. There is nothing to explain. (*TWB*, p. 76)

There is, of course, much emotional efficacy in presenting a coherent narrative, and Debbie formulates this for her: “It’s about balance, Katherine. Balance something bad with something good, not to satisfy some divine sense of justice, just to give yourself a bit of peace.” (*TWB*, p. 116) Katherine later summarises this process in straightforward, almost schematic terms: ‘She tries to work out what she might have done that could account for this feeling so that she can work out what to do in order to cancel it.’ (*TWB*, p. 218) The clear-sighted manner in which she understands the nature of these mechanisms shows that such emotional ‘balance’ is only necessary if she attaches herself, psychologically, to the importance of such stories. Balance something bad against something good, and in this way attain a sense of emotional stability. This, surely, explains the instinct to find causes in the

first place. If there were no emotional payoff to establishing a sense of balance – even on a symbolic level – then what would be the point of psychotherapy, or self-analysis?

Although Katherine can reap the benefits of such psychological complexities, the way she characterises these processes exposes their largely arbitrary nature, and in this way Katherine's attitude collapses the impetus of a psychologically motivated plot. She posits potential explanatory structures of this kind, trying out motives for her decision to travel to Russia:

She entertains the idea that there is a reason for her being here, that this is an attempt at emotional reconciliation or catharsis. Perhaps she feels bad about the past and so she has come here, to Russia, in pilgrimage, a symbolic gesture of penitence [...]. (TWB, p. 210)

She does the work of her own narrator, positing causes for her actions, formulating motive, mirroring the attempts of the novel in which she features to motivate her within the narrative by which her sense of self is structured. Typically, however, she immediately deflates any impetus such motives might encourage.

It is an attractive idea which is, finally, rather silly, but, she supposes, all the dramatic gestures we make, all the symbolic attempts to balance or rectify an emotional or spiritual imbalance are arbitrary. We make up these stories to suit us, and so she can use this, if she likes, if she does feel bad, if there are accounts, so to speak, to balance. She thanks herself and laughs. (TWB, p. 211)

Katherine does not play the game of narrative. In the end, 'what are they really made of, reasons, motives? Nothing. She can invent one later on, if there is a need, and if she wants to believe in it, she will.' (TWB, p. 199) Katherine demonstrates a Non-Narrative, Episodic sense of self that does irreparable damage to psychological plotting. The novel's events – what happens – are not instinctively internalised and integrated into a narrative instinct, used to compel *what happens next*. The novel's plot and its protagonist are uncoupled, distinct, and because Katherine's subjective experience is not entangled with the processes and events

surrounding her, those processes and events exist simply as they are. They are just *things happening*. The novel's plotting is inert and ineffectual. The same point could of course be made in a series of novels in which nothing – or nothing much – happens, but the point is that Katherine's detachment is all the more exaggerated in a novel whose plot seems to call for her to engage with the conceptual self. That she doesn't, despite the relative drama of the events surrounding her, brings this detachment into relief.

TWB instates into what happens a character who does not integrate what happens into the narrative of the self. One of Katherine's 'fragments' explicitly articulates this schematic: 'Emotional responses shaped by or at least interacting with the things that happen. And this correlative trajectory describes the story of us.' (*TWB*, p. 150) And, 'Ah,' says G.H., 'I know so many interesting stories.' (*The Passion*, p. 78) A sceptical reflection on the idea of a self composed by stories as offering anything more than a stabilising but ultimately unnecessary organisation of events, an organisation that could just as plausibly be something other than whichever story the subject settles upon. 'I cannot put into words what the system was, but I lived inside a system.' (*The Passion*, p. 168) The system is narrative, a sensible, orderly narrative in which "life and loves of G.H." is an orientating summary, just as another of Katherine's fragments, 'Describing a trajectory we could sensibly call, *The Story of the Filmmaker's Life*' (*TWB*, p. 209), is, in its simplicity, a comment upon the apparent accuracy to which such breezy statements attest.

Towards the end of part one, Katherine relents, she does as her therapy sessions encourage her to do and indulges herself and her audience in the story of a self.

[...] she begins to formulate an opinion of herself, to measure each moment against a better alternative, to give weight to the cumulative disparity between what she could have been and what she is. There is a glimmer of belief, she believes for a moment that if she can attach herself to this story, if she can pair these emotions with a sensible history then this [...] will define her. (*TWB*, p. 69)

For a moment, she engages fully in the supporting structures which formulate the self into a coherent self concept, and she experiences the sense of satisfaction that comes from expending the narrative instinct in a unified way. After all, as Jerome Bruner points out, ‘We seem to have no other way of describing “lived time” save in the form of a narrative.’¹⁰⁵ Bruner’s suggestion lacks the sense of emotional attachment that *narrating* her life, as Katherine does in the above passage, seems to encourage; it is this attachment that gives her rendering its appeal, not the power of the truth or otherwise of the account itself. Bruner asks, in the same paper, whether life-stories ‘had better be viewed not as a record of what happened [...] but rather as a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience [...]’.¹⁰⁶ Coetzee, in conversation with the psychoanalyst Arabella Kurtz, asks a similar question: ‘Are all autobiographies, all life-narratives, not fictions, at least in the sense that they are constructions?’¹⁰⁷

The construction of one’s ‘life-narrative’ is not the life itself, but a representation of it. In her therapy sessions with Len, Katherine suggests that a reflection upon one’s past may isolate a genuine instance of causal impact; that an event really might have impacted upon her behaviour, but the fact that ‘the sounds they make’ are ‘ridiculous’ (*TWB*, p. 78) shows that she understands she may just as easily be wrong. When she is ‘narrating’ herself as she recites her step one, she makes a further crucial observation in this respect: ‘as she describes these feelings she brings them to life, she experiences them now, which means that she is telling the truth, and she is powerfully moved by it.’ (*TWB*, p. 69)

What happened in the past is not the cause of the way Katherine feels while reciting her step one: the self concept is structured by the present telling of events, not the events

¹⁰⁵ Bruner, *Narrative* p. 692

¹⁰⁶ Bruner, *Narrative* p. 691

¹⁰⁷ J. M. Coetzee (with Arabella Kurtz), *The Good Story: Exchanges on Truth, Fiction and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy* (London: Penguin, 2015) p. 3

themselves. Edwards suggests that the act of recounting one's past is the only truth there is.

That is,

What people really think, know, intend, etc., are the actively managed interactional concerns of talk, text and other expressive domains of social life, typically backdated, of course, to having occurred prior to the act [of telling]. That is what 'really did' amounts to in practice.¹⁰⁸

The subject imbues the story of the self an added weight and authenticity when the emotions it describes are true, but as the above analysis suggests, such 'truths' are slippery things. Katherine employs the narrative instinct and scaffolds a sense of self, interpreting her experience in order to create a sense of emotional stability, and then she 'slough[s] it off' (TWB, p. 70). The passage itself is, stylistically, the most complex in the novel; the tone shifts as she shapes, moulds, and accepts a self, and then she discards it once more, and the novel reassumes the minimalist aesthetic with which the rest of her story is rendered.

Immediately following the passage in which she structures and thereby *creates* a sensibly narrated self, she reflects on the narrative text she has been composing. She crafts a fiction which satisfies the narrative instinct through an explicable psychology.

Where there are gaps, moments which aren't motivated in a clear or sensible way, she invents some complicated psychological mechanisms, and all the characters act as though these motives are true and uncomplicated, and so they probably are. [...] she ties these sequences together with a central character who acts for clear and discernible reasons, whose psychology amounts to an internal mechanism driving the plot [...] (TWB, p. 80)

She then abstracts this character from those structures, she reformulates the novel as a long sequence of fragments, leaving the reader with isolated observations, comments, insights, and persistent references to violence, murder, and 'the shadow of a deity'. She is attempting to show the reader *what happens* as being distinct from how a character *feels about what happens*, but nonetheless gesturing, through the ominous hints towards a coherent

¹⁰⁸ Derek Edwards, 'Discourse, Cognition and Social Practices: The Rich Surface of Language and Social Interaction' in *Discourse Studies*, Vol. 8, Issue 41 (2006) pp. 41-49 p. 45

structure that the fragments seem to compose, to the inevitability of the instinct to re-attach this decoupled relationship, thereby holding the narrative instinct at the same place of poised frustration at which G.H. suspends herself, suddenly aware that ‘every moment of “lack-of-meaning” is precisely the frightening certainty that that’s exactly what it means.’ (*The Passion*, p. 27) The absence of the ability to synthesise external events – what happens – with how a character is feeling about what happens, marks the absence of an orientating self concept, while it simultaneously frustrates a reader’s ability to interpret the novel’s events through the prism of the protagonist’s psychology.

3. Internalising the External

3.1. The Correlate

TWB is attracted to quietude, it hopes to encourage in the reader a meditative experience of Katherine free from the interpretive frameworks that might otherwise seek to explain her. The novel is committed to avoiding a psychological, subjective rendering of reality; it attempts to describe reality as it is to itself, rather than as it is experienced by a subject. Early drafts of the novel were written in general ignorance of the philosophical problems with attempting to show an objective reality beyond or outside of the subjective experience of it. An analysis of Lispector's text serves to clarify these intuitive motivations as it demonstrates the inevitable *failure* of the attempt to describe a reality free from subjective experience. This chapter considers Robbe-Grillet's commitment to objects in this context and suggests that, like Lispector, his attempt to describe things as they are is defeated by that very attempt, but that, unlike Lispector, Robbe-Grillet's fictions never explicitly challenge or acknowledge this fact.

The point of *TWB* is not to remove Katherine's psychology, but to show that her psychology does not instinctively distort the reality it encounters. Katherine does not incorporate everything she encounters into her own psychological understanding of it. When this does occur, she is acutely aware of the process, and her analysis of it renders those processes unusually impotent. Katherine experiences reality phenomenologically but does not organise these experiences into psychological structures. Still another way of framing this argument is to suggest that if psychological fictions and the realisms they compose depend on these relationships – between subjective and objective; experience and psychology; self and self concept – then *TWB* persistently frustrates these syntheses. *TWB* responds to a tendency for fiction to psychologise everything it encounters, where the novel presents everything through the prism of a psychological interpretation. In an article for *The New York Review of*

Books, Smith (2008) recognises this tendency as a central and strangulating presence in contemporary realism. In considering O'Neill's *Netherland* (2009) and its persistent subjectivizing – a taxi-cab's black exhaust becomes the 'foul mechanical dark' of American bureaucracy, for example – Smith concludes that 'Everything must be made literary. Nothing escapes.'¹⁰⁹ In this sense, 'literature' marks the absorption of reality by a transforming subjectivity, which subjectivity psychologises and analyses everything it encounters through the prism of itself. *TWB* recoils from this tendency towards a minimalist aesthetic that attempts to simply show things as they are, despite the philosophical complications that inevitably attend this endeavour.

...

Whenever a subject thinks about, conceives of or describes an objective reality, that reality becomes correlated with the subjectivity conceiving of it. Objective *things* become subjective *experiences*, merely by being perceived. Quentin Meillassoux characterises this philosophical circularity as 'correlationsim' (Meillassoux, 2012), and Lispector's fierce, philosophical interrogations commit her to it, thus undermining the novel's attempt to introspect *beyond* subjectivity to the objective reality which exceeds it. 3.2. contends that Lispector conceives of the objectivity towards which she aspires as representing an infinitude she aligns with God. Lispector's attempt to 'inhabit' an objective reality is therefore cast as an attempt to attain the divine, and *The Passion's* deflationary conclusions (that one can only maintain the integrity of an objective reality, and therefore of God, by leaving it alone and remaining silent about it) lead to the chapter's own philosophical conclusion, which states that a commitment to a reality *as it is* commits one to silence. The chapter concludes by showing that Katherine's experiences with the world, her attitude towards these ideas, rescues

¹⁰⁹ Zadie Smith, 'Two Paths for the Novel' ><https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/11/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/>< [accessed May 30th, 2019]

her from the metaphysical anguish Lispector confronts and interrogates. While Katherine is ultimately a hopeful character, the novel nonetheless (and inevitably) fails to attain its motivating philosophical ideals.

In considering the interaction between objective entities and the subjective experience of them, Searle emphasises the ‘ontological distinction between modes of existence.’

Some entities – mountains, molecules for example – have an existence independent of any experience. They are ontologically objective. But others – pains, tickles and itches, for example – exist only insofar as they are experienced by a human or animal subject. They are ontologically subjective.¹¹⁰

The self is born of the relationship between ontologically objective entities – such as hands – and the subjective experience of them: *my* hands. ‘Katherine looks at her hands and laughs, surprised. The fact of them – her hands – don’t seem commensurate to how strange it is that she is here.’ (TWB, p. 36)

The jarring nature of this realisation – these hands are *mine* – contains within it the interaction between objective entities and the subjective experience of them. The hands remain what they are, physical objects, whether Katherine experiences them as her own or not, but in the moment of recognition – these hands are mine – they exist to Katherine through the orientating perspective of her own subjectivity. This perspective generates a self as it generates an ‘out there’; inside and outside as simultaneously constitutive. As Thompson puts it, in his analysis of Maturana and Varela’s (1980) concept of *autopoiesis*, the self-generating and self-sustaining processes characteristic of life, ‘the dynamic emergence of interiority can be [...] described as the dynamic co-emergence of interiority and

¹¹⁰ John Searle, *Seeing Things As They Are* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 16 Hereafter, *Searle, Seeing* p. 16 This is not a straightforward claim. For every subjective experience – every pain, tickle, and itch – there is a corresponding neural and physiological process or event. These processes or events *are*, of course, objective; they have a material existence just like mountains and molecules. Searle is implicitly suggesting here that the physical event and the subjective experience of it – what it *feels like* to have an itch, tickle, or pain – are different things. This claim goes to the heart of the hard problem of consciousness (see Chalmers, 1996).

exteriority.’¹¹¹

To reclaim or inhabit an ontological objectivity would involve somehow understanding that hands are objective physical objects without that understanding occurring within the mind of the subject experiencing it; a philosophical paradox. Quentin Meillassoux characterises this circularity as ‘correlationism’ (Meillassoux, 2012, 2014), a philosophical paradigm with its origins in Kant’s positioning of the *thing-in-itself* (objects as they are independent of observation) as forever beyond our reach.¹¹²

If you speak about something [...] you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. The argument for this thesis is as simple to formulate as it is difficult to refute: it can be called the “argument from the circle”, and consists in remarking that every objection against correlationism is an objection produced by your thinking, and so dependent upon it. [...] The circle means that there is a vicious circle in any naive realism, a performative contradiction through which you refute what you say or think by your very act of saying or thinking it.¹¹³

A description of things *as they are* can only ever be a description of things as they are *to me*, which defeats any attempt to present the world as it is *to itself*. Braver summarises the philosophical impact of correlationism:

We can never capture reality as it truly is because it’s always *we* who are trying to capture it. The very attempt to faithfully represent the world introduces interference, and this distortion gets replicated in all our attempts to get at the world, since all our attempts bring along ourselves as knowers.’¹¹⁴

The philosophical practice of Phenomenology commits itself, after Husserl, to ‘bracketing’ (Husserl, 2012) an external reality from a consideration of what *is*, thereby

¹¹¹ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of the Mind* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007) p.79 Hereafter, *Thompson, Mind*

¹¹² ‘[...] if we view the objects of the senses as mere appearances, as is fitting, then we thereby admit at the very same time that a thing in itself underlies them, although we are not acquainted with this thing as it may be constituted in itself, but only with its appearance, i.e., with the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something.’ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics (Revised)*, trans. by Gary Hatfield (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) §32, p. 66.

¹¹³ Quentin Meillassoux in, Anna Longo (ed.), *Time Without Becoming*, trans. by Anna Longo (Paris: Mimesis International, 2014) p. 8

¹¹⁴ Lee Braver, ‘On Not Settling the Issue of Realism’ in, *Speculations: A Journal of Speculative Realism*, Vol. IV (2013) pp. 9-14 p. 10 Hereafter, *Braver, Realism*

cleaving itself free of Kantian Idealism, rendering the in-itself, the world beyond subjective experience, an irrelevant abstraction. Phenomenology therefore commits itself to an evaluation of subjective experience, a metaphysics undisturbed by the inaccessibility of ‘the real’. Such a stance suggests ‘that a world in-itself is out there [which is] always implicitly saying that a world in-itself exists *for us*; even its in-itselfness is something we’re positing.’¹¹⁵

Phenomenology after Husserl insists that the real is more than a synthesis, a product of our conscious perception, and that things exist independently of our knowledge of them. Such philosophies suggest this rescues Phenomenology from Idealism, though Sparrow (2014) insists that all efforts to rehabilitate Phenomenology from the method to which its principle of principles’ commits it are futile.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Searle dismisses Phenomenology¹¹⁷ and poses a problem fundamental to that practice. If all we have access to is our own subjective experience, then how can we come to have any knowledge of an external reality? Searle further suggests that Representationalism – the idea that all we perceive are our own subjective experiences – mistakes the percept itself as the *object* of perception. Opposing this, Searle contends that the brain does not produce a representation of the environment, which representation one then perceives; rather, one directly perceives an object, an external object that really exists. This is the reason for Searle’s title, *Seeing Things as They Are*. But the nature of the percept is partly specified by the apparatus with which one perceives things, and if experience *is* the subjective perception of something, it is not the thing itself. Change the

¹¹⁵ Braver, *Realism* p. 10

¹¹⁶ Sparrow’s suggestion is contentious. For example, for Brown (2008), phenomenology that does not commit to the method of ‘bracketing’ excuses itself from that practice’s restraints and contradictions, while Sparrow (2014) contends that phenomenology that does not practice bracketing is *not* phenomenology. See Tom Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology: Metaphysics and the New Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) Hereafter, *Sparrow*. See also, Steven Ravett Brown, ‘Must Phenomenology Rest on a Paradox? Implications of Methodology-Limited Theories’ in, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 12 (2008) pp. 5-33

¹¹⁷ ‘I will have very little to say about Phenomenology as a movement and a lot to say about phenomenology as a phenomena.’ Searle, *Seeing* p. 14

apparatus and you change the percept, hence *Seeing Things as They Are* leaves itself open to a reframing of the correlationist stance: *Seeing Things as They Are to Us*.

In presenting a gloss on Graham Harman's Speculative Realism,¹¹⁸ Sparrow makes clear such an argument insists on the real, but emphasises its 'deforming' nature:

The implication [...] is that there is some way for the object to be apart from how it is perceived, but that we are forever barred from accessing this object as it is apart from us. It is, moreover, impossible for me to even imagine this object without deforming it.¹¹⁹

Sparrow insists that a commitment to the Phenomenological method of inquiry bars the analyst from positing a reality external to itself, though Thompson (2007), whose 'enactive approach' is informed by and elaborates on the Phenomenological tradition of evaluating one's experiential 'disclosure' of the world, dismisses the claim that the Phenomenological method *must* deny the existence of an external reality. Like Searle, Thompson insists one can be committed to a belief that the world is *mediated* through subjective experience, without having to deny the existence of a reality external to these experiences.¹²⁰ If one is touching an apple, then one is experiencing one's *touching an apple*; one is not experiencing *the apple itself*, though the experience would not be what it is if there were no apple. In this way, perception more broadly is an inextricably coupled synthesis between body and world, where the body (perceptual apparatuses, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive feedback, and neuronal activity) encounters the object and thereby discloses

¹¹⁸ Speculative Realism is a movement in contemporary Continental philosophy which attempts to challenge, in various ways, the dominance of Kantian Idealism by an insistence on forms of metaphysical realism. The name comes from a conference held at Goldsmiths University in April 2007. Philosophers loosely associated with the name include Ian Hamilton Grant and Ray Brassier, as well as Meillassoux and Harman. For a good overview of the movement, see Peter Gratton, *Speculative Realism: Problems and Prospects* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014)

¹¹⁹ Sparrow p. 74

¹²⁰ '[...] reality is that which is disclosed to us as real, whether in everyday perception or scientific investigation, and such disclosure is an achievement of consciousness. The point here is not that the world would not exist if not for consciousness. Rather, it is that we have no grip on what reality means apart from what is disclosed to us as real, and such disclosure necessarily involves the intentional activity of consciousness.' Thompson, *Mind* p. 21

the world to itself.¹²¹

But what does that mean? It means one cannot experience that apple as it is *before one experiences it*. It is *this* reality that is forever beyond our grasp; the apple as it is *for itself*. This is the reality to which G.H. aspires. Meillassoux summarises this idea, and in doing so neatly encapsulates Lispector's central ambition, and its inevitable failure:

[...] the transcendental [...] remains indissociable from the notion of *point of view*. Let us suppose a subject without a point of view on the world – such a subject would have access to the world as a totality, without anything escaping from its instantaneous inspection of objective reality. But such a subject would thereby violate the essential finitude of the transcendental subject – the world for it would [...] be the [...] transparent object of an immediately achieved and effective knowledge.¹²²

G.H. attempts to apprehend reality in its totality, before that reality is ordered by the subjectivity that experiences it, a totality she characterises as 'the violent loving unconsciousness of whatever exists [which] surpasses the possibility of my consciousness.' (G.H., p. 144) While both novels, *The Passion* and *TWB*, gesture towards an objective reality, both intuitively recognise the futility of this ambition. One's perspective, one's very ability to think, guarantees one's status as *other* than the very 'totality' one is trying to think.

Katherine pauses in a field, pushes her hands in the dirt, and realises that truly understanding or communing with the world as it is apart from her is not possible.

Her fingers are cold, the mud is slick. She imagines this mud as it was without her, as it is, a lack of experience, a sudden vacuum of thought. A world without our

¹²¹ Gilbert Harman's (1973) 'brain in a vat' thought experiment seeks to contest such a claim. The experiment suggests that if experience is an exclusively brain-bound affair, then manipulating the brain in just the right way will produce the experience of 'touching an apple' even without there being an apple, nor indeed anything to touch it with. If this were true, then there is nothing to logically contest the possibility that I am, in fact, a brain in a vat, manipulated in such a way that I experience myself as an extended body interacting with a 'real' environment. Enactivist theories of cognition challenge this idea by arguing that perception and experience is *not* exclusively brain-bound; that perception depends on the body, on kinaesthetic feedback loops which interact dynamically with neurological processes in order to instantiate the sorts of experiences bodies make possible. As Thompson concludes, in the brain in a vat scenario, the very thing doing the manipulating would have to resemble the particular bodies and processes that humans possess and experience. In a sense, then, the human brain *is* in a 'vat', though the 'vat' in question is a human body. See *Thompson, Mind*.

¹²² Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. by Ray Brassier (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) p. 24. Hereafter, *Meillassoux, Finitude*

experience of it is a banal reality. There is nothing to be said about it, because as soon as we say anything it becomes something it is not. (*TWB*, p. 79)

The world *as it is* as a banal reality that becomes something it is not the moment it is thought. The only thing we can *do* with that reality is leave it alone and remain silent about it.

Lee Braver attempts to outline a middle ground by suggesting that the existence of an objective reality nonetheless impinges upon subjective experience, giving an intimation of a reality we can never truly *know*.¹²³ Considered in these contexts, G.H.'s contemplation of the roach marks the novel's 'Transgressive Realism' (Braver, 2013), which

[...] emphasizes the way reality *unsettles* us [through experiences] with a reality unformed by human concepts, when a true beyond touches us, sending shivers through our perceptual schemes, shaking us out of any complacent feeling-at-home.'¹²⁴

Consciousness depends on the perspective through which it occurs, while *self*-consciousness is an awareness of this perspective. As Zahavi puts it, in a gloss on Damasio and Metzinger's insistence on the phenomenological underpinnings of the self:

When I think of the moon, read a text, perceive a windowsill, a red book, or a steaming teacup, I automatically and implicitly sense that I, rather than anyone else, am doing it. I sense that the objects I now perceive are being apprehended from my perspective and that the thoughts formed in my mind are mine and not anyone else's. Thus [...] my conscious life is characterized by a constant, but quiet and subtle, presence of self.¹²⁵

Zahavi is here describing the feeling of selfhood (a sense of mineness), and in doing so he describes a relationship between – in Searle's terminology – an ontologically objective

¹²³ Kant (2004) distinguishes between *knowing* the absolute, which is impossible, and *thinking* the absolute, which is not. Meillassoux (2012) characterises these as representative of 'strong' and 'weak' correlationism. However, by exempting Kant himself from 'strong correlationism', Meillassoux excuses the target of his criticism. For this reason, correlationism, as Meillassoux outlines it, serves as a useful paradigm within which to situate Lispector's philosophical ambitions, even if, as David Golumbia suggests, it is problematic as a valid critique of Kant's own stance: 'What is especially striking about this admission [that Kant was a 'weak' correlationist] is that it precisely uses the language with which Meillassoux before and after this remark defines correlationism, while explicitly stating that it does not apply to Kant.' David Golumbia, 'Correlationism: The Dogma That Never Was' in, *Boundary 2*, Vol. 43, Issue 2 (2016) pp. 1-25 p. 10

¹²⁴ Braver, *Realism* p. 12

¹²⁵ Zahavi, *Self and Other* p. 185

sequence of things – a red book, a windowsill, a teacup – and the ontologically subjective experience of them. The objects are the same, but the experience of an object is not the object itself, and so the object is changed *for the subject*: from objective to subjective. It remains what it is but is experienced as it is *to him*. Despite his experience of them, the windowsill, the book, and the teacup remain stranded in their isolated reality.¹²⁶

The novels (*The Passion*, *TWB*) deal with these ideas in different ways. G.H.’s encounter with the cockroach represents this ‘shaking of the foundations’; it encourages her to conceive of things as they are and, in the process, clarifies the structures of a self which changes things as they are into things as they are *to her*. The novel commits itself to dissolving those distinctions and attempting to re-inhabit, to grasp, to become, an objectivity, a project doomed to failure. In contrast, Katherine understands that her experience of the world is a mediated representation of reality; she experiences her hands as her own and is satisfied by the strangeness of this transformative encounter. This results in an estrangement from broader structures of meaning, structures which compel her to integrate this initial ‘deforming’ of reality into a meaningful and coherent conceptual entity. Of course, this division between perception of the thing and thing in itself is complicated further by the written word. The sign

obscures its true status as a linguistic sign by generating the illusion that through it the reader [...] can perceive “reality” as it “really” is and that this can occur without the intervention of the sign itself.¹²⁷

For Lispector, language is both ‘a weblike trap [and an] anarchically liberating force.’¹²⁸ Fixating solely on the dislocation between signifier and signified denies, in

¹²⁶ Harman’s Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) seeks to free Continental Philosophy from its anthropocentric biases and construct a metaphysics based on and around objects as they are to themselves. See Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican Books, 2018)

¹²⁷ Earl E. Fitz, *Sexuality and Being in the Poststructuralist Universe of Clarice Lispector: The Différance of Desire* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2001) p. 26 Hereafter, *Fitz, Lispector*

¹²⁸ *Fitz, Lispector* p. 25

Eagleton's phrase, 'the productive nature'¹²⁹ of language. Remember Cixous: 'there is a Clarice way of making-the-tulip.'¹³⁰ Even in *The Passion*, a novel whose syntactic contortions seek to penetrate beyond the word to the silence of God, Lispector's language is astonishingly fecund and generative.

3.2. Preserving the Objective

As Damasio phrases it, 'Organisms unequipped to generate core consciousness are condemned to making images of sight or sound or touch, there and then, but cannot come to know that they did.'¹³¹ Lispector's cockroach is therefore sentient, but it has no sense of self, and if there is no self conscious of the distinction between it and the objective world, then the whole of the world and the roach are the same. This is G.H.'s movement towards a conception of the roach's objectivity as belonging to 'the infinite': 'A roach is greater than I am because its life is so given over to Him that it comes from the infinite and goes toward the infinite without noticing.' (*The Passion*, p. 131)

The cockroach is external to G.H., it inhabits a truly objective reality that is beyond her reach. G.H.'s ambition is to inhabit that reality; not to *be me* but to simply *be*; to touch the reality of things as they are to themselves without deforming them, without being conscious of her own subjective experiences, to *be* an objective reality herself. In typical fashion, Lispector uses her uniquely strange poetics to express this ambition, and, through the potency of her prose, renders a philosophical impossibility tantalisingly possible.

Whatever God is was more in the neutral noise of the leaves in the wind than in my old human prayer. [...] That murmur, without any human meaning, would be my

¹²⁹ Terry Eagleton, 'Post-Structuralism' in, *Literary Theory, An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) p. 136

¹³⁰ Cixous, *Approach* p. 72

¹³¹ Damasio, *What Happens* p. 26

identity touching the identity of things. I know that, in relation to the human, that neutral prayer would be a monstrosity. But in relation to whatever is God, it would be: being. (*The Passion*, p. 138)

Barthes (2012) considers Robbe-Grillet's persistent, precise description of objects as an attempt to liberate the word from the interpretive structures by which such objects are surrounded. As Sartre remarks, '[...] everything we name loses its innocence, becoming part of the world we live in.'¹³² By fixating on descriptions of *things*, the object is removed from its literary function; it simply *is*. Barthes compares this effect with a movement in modern poetry:

The interrupted flow of the new poetic language initiates a discontinuous Nature, which is revealed only piecemeal. At the very moment when the withdrawal of functions obscures relations existing in the world, the object in discourse assumes an exalted place.¹³³

In a defence of literary minimalism, Saltzman remarks that 'it is the quality of regard paid to an object [in minimalist fiction] and not the merit of the object itself which redeems it.'¹³⁴ And as Katherine herself remarks, 'Look at it closely enough, and everything is what it is.' (*TWB*, p. 199)

By fixating on objects, Robbe-Grillet removes them from the context of the narrative in which they exist. A moment of isolation that removes their narrative function and 'redeems' or elevates that object. As Meillassoux's paradigm makes clear, this 'redeeming' of the object can never be complete. The description occurs in the mind of the writer conceiving of it or the character by whom it is perceived. Robbe-Grillet 'posits a reality prior to meaning'¹³⁵ but is faced with the same philosophical paradox that frustrates Lispector's

¹³² John-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1965) p. 62

¹³³ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012) p. 50 Hereafter, *Barthes, Degree Zero*

¹³⁴ Arthur M. Saltzman, 'To See a World in a Grain of Sand: Expanding Literary Minimalism' in, *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1990) pp. 423-433 p. 426

¹³⁵ Ronald L. Bogue, 'Roland Barthes, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and the Paradise of the Writerly Text' in, *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1980) pp. 157-171 p. 162 Hereafter, *Bogue*

attempt to fully or finally attain such a reality. By conceiving of that reality, he makes it something it was not. Robbe-Grillet never formulated or confronted this paradox, instead insisting that

In the future universe of the novel, gestures and objects will be *there* before being *something*; and they will still be there afterwards, hard, unalterable, eternally present, mocking their own ‘meaning’, that meaning which vainly tries to reduce them [...].¹³⁶

In the context of this chapter, such a hope does not seem to be a prophecy for the novel, but rather a powerful and stultifying rejoinder to it. An objective reality precedes and exceeds *any and all* description of it. Such a reality exists completely independently of the minds that transform it. Reality exceeds art, and all art can ever do is gesture towards this excess. Contrary to Barthes’ emphasis on external relationships between objects in Robbe-Grillet’s novels, Robbe-Grillet himself hinted at the fruitfulness of a psychoanalytic reading of the texts¹³⁷ and Stoltzfus (1962) offers a useful overview of a psychological interpretation, suggesting that, ‘As a substitute for analysis, Robbe-Grillet has objectified the states of mind of his protagonist (particularly in *Le Voyeur* and *La Jalousie*).’¹³⁸ One could say, then, that Robbe-Grillet’s fictions *are* psychologically motivated, but it is important to recognise that even if a psychoanalytic reading is encouraged, that psychology is not elaborated from within the text but inferred from it (which is the same as saying ‘imposed upon it’).

TWB nonetheless repeats Robbe-Grillet’s attempt to render an objective reality as it is. Just as the self is the answer to a question the organism *never posed*, so the world is not disturbed or transformed in its objective nature by a subjective encounter with it. The novel attempts to *preserve* an objective reality even as it describes it through Katherine’s subjective

¹³⁶ Alain Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction*, trans. by Richard Howard (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989) p. 21

¹³⁷ See Robert Champigny, ‘In Search of the Pure Recit’ in, *The American Society Legion of Honor Magazine*, Vol. 27 (Winter 1956-1957) pp. 331-343

¹³⁸ Stoltzfus, p. 500

experience. In *The Passion*, the cockroach's lack of a delimiting perspective, its inability to recognise itself, to conceptualise a distinction between self and other, are not seen by G.H. as constitutive of a negativity; rather, that absence, that *lack*, constitute a positive move towards God and the infinite. *TWB* is similarly motivated by the *value* placed on an objective reality undisturbed by an interpreting subject, and Katherine's calmness, her simplicity, her lack of emotional expression, is a gesture towards the spirituality of her communion with a world undisturbed by her interpretation of it. By insisting on the undisturbed nature of that reality, the novel reinforces Katherine's sense of psychological detachment; her *freedom*, as this essay characterises the stance.

This reading of G.H. – that an inaccessible objectivity somehow represents, in its unknowability, the realm of God – aligns her closely with Meillassoux's ominous verdict on 'the end of metaphysics', a philosophical destitution his *After Finitude* attempts to remedy:

The end of metaphysics, understood as the 'de-absolutization of thought', is thereby seen to consist in the rational legitimization of any and every variety of religious (or 'poetico-religious') belief in the absolute, so long as the latter invokes no authority beyond itself. To put it in other words: *by forbidding reason any claim to the absolute, the end of metaphysics has taken the form of an exacerbated return of the religious.*¹³⁹

G.H. exemplifies this 'return of the religious', though she uses God more as the receptacle for a philosophical remainder than an earnest supposition. As Levinas writes, 'The idea of the infinite consists precisely and paradoxically in thinking more than what I thought while nevertheless conserving it in its excessive relation to thought.' G.H. is attempting to 'grasp the ungraspable while nevertheless guaranteeing its status as ungraspable.'¹⁴⁰

God is the infinite, the boundary of whose otherness is drawn by G.H.'s difference to

¹³⁹ Meillassoux, *Finitude* p. 45

¹⁴⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, 'Transcendence and Height' in Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996) p. 19

It. That boundary defines G.H., and simultaneously closes her off from God, guaranteeing her estrangement. G.H.'s subjectivity bars her from the infinite, and if the infinite is where God resides then confining herself to a delimited subjectivity is original sin: 'I had fallen into the temptation of seeing, the temptation of knowing and feeling.' (*The Passion*, p. 132)

Lispector is suggesting that there was a time (*before the fall*) when she *hadn't* 'fallen into the temptation of seeing', a time when the self was not a self as organised through interaction and language, nor even a core or ecological self, bordered by the parameters of a question to which it is the answer, but a self without limits, a transcendent self. This is a conception of the self which lacks all the requisites of self this essay has been describing. A self-cancelling self; a contradiction and an impossibility. G.H. can only attempt to delineate the other through the sorts of philosophical contortions, paradoxes and contradictions that she fixates upon.

By positioning Lispector's conceptualisation of God as the absolute beyond her capacity to think it, one can see Katherine's prayer as a reaffirmation of the correlate, which nonetheless results in a brief dislocation from the self which affirms it:

She remembers being on her knees in the graveyard back home, asking herself if she believed in something. She asked the day, asked the white sky beyond the spire and then, closer, she said to her own hands, to a self estranged by the sound of her own voice, "Do you believe in God, Katherine?" (*TWB*, p. 43)

In attempting to commune with a God beyond her ability to comprehend It, Katherine can only talk to herself, as whatever conceptualisation of God she can muster encapsulates the absolute within her own subjectivity. At the same time, the contradiction produces a rupture, where her certainty of the correlate – God's absoluteness is rendered finite by her capacity to think It – estranges her from the self capable of performing this paradox. If subjectivity organises meaning and makes it what it is, then in Lispector's philosophy only lack-of-meaning brings us back to God: 'What I say to God must not make sense! If it makes

sense it is because I err.’ (*The Passion*, p. 169)

G.H. ‘errs’ by becoming the self who ‘sees’ and ‘knows’, removing her from the limitless neutrality of a God without any conceptual borders, borders clarified and reinforced by the structures of self. In her earlier novel, *The Apple in the Dark* (1985), Lispector prefigures the themes of *The Passion*:

And under the yellow sun, sitting on a stone, without the least bit of security, the man was now rejoicing, as if not understanding were a kind of creation.¹⁴¹

Here, Lispector emphasises the freedom which comes from not understanding. In *The Passion*, G.H. attempts to argue herself into this freedom, grappling with those structures in which she is ensnared, attempting to confound meaning while being trapped in the novel’s over-arching paradox: to knowingly attest to meaninglessness is to make meaninglessness meaningful, as it can only exist as the converse of ‘meaningful’ and is therefore defined, and no longer the lack-of-meaning towards which it attempts to gesture.

3.3. Internalising the External

As she recounts the end of her experience with the roach, G.H. finally concedes to the emptiness of her endeavour. She contemplates the roach, understands that her subjective experience denies her access to the cockroach’s lack of subjectivity, attempts to dissolve the structures which bind her to her own transformative perspective, and then she contemplates the spoils of this attempt:

They gave me everything, and just look what everything is! It is a roach that is alive and is about to die. And then I looked at the door handle. After that I looked at the wood of the wardrobe. I looked at the glass of the window. Just look at what everything is: it’s a piece of thing, a piece of iron, of gravel, of glass. I said to myself:

¹⁴¹ Clarice Lispector, *The Apple in the Dark*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (London: Virago Press, 1985) p. 27

Look what I fought for, to have exactly what I already had, I crawled until the doors opened for me, the doors of the treasure I was seeking: and look what the treasure was! (*The Passion*, p. 141)

The in-itself is a useless concept. She can do nothing with it, for as soon as she ‘has’ it, it is no longer itself, while, at the same time, it remains what it always was. Objectivity is a banal reality; there is nothing to be said about it. In order to maintain it she must simply leave it alone. ‘What would I do with what had been given to me?’ (*The Passion*, p. 142) asks G.H. The argument here formulated constitutes a reply: *Nothing*. G.H. has not freed herself from herself; *she* remains the one doing the looking. But her perceptions are, for a moment, cleaved free of the interactive schematics that help the self concept to proliferate. There is a ‘pure’ experience here; an experience of things as they are *to her* (for there is no other way to experience them), but by emphasising these objects as being simply what they are – glass, gravel, iron – she experiences things but denies herself an interpretation of them, thereby, at least, gesturing towards their objective reality. Of course, even describing gravel *as* gravel or glass *as* glass is a violation of the nature of these objects as they are to themselves; gravel, to itself, is not ‘gravel’, it simply *is*. But this is as close as we get, G.H. seems to be saying, to an appreciation of reality as it is without her. The sentiment of this passage is obliquely referenced when Katherine sits in the grounds of the hospital (1:11). She is killing herself, and the novel indulges in an ostentatious display of pathetic fallacy:

She’s running out of pills. The atmosphere breaks. A flutter of lightning above the horizon and then a satisfying roll of thunder. Rain comes. Some of the boys delight in it, holding out their arms, their heads tilted back. That lush smell of minerals and thunder. Katherine clenches her teeth. Her stomach cramps. (*TWB*, p. 75)

The co-existence of the world and her subjective experience of it are represented by a preposition: *and*. ‘She is in pain *and* the world seems very beautiful.’ (emphasis added). The fact that she is in pain does not detract from the beauty of the world: ‘The feeling makes nothing new, it just passes, leaving a faint bruise. The world carries on.’ (*TWB*, p. 57). It

thunders as she swallows the pills. A symbiotic relationship of self and world in which each yet remains wholly distinct from the other.

The inaccessibility of ‘the real’ is a concession Robbe-Grillet never makes as he attempts to ‘create a writing that bears no sign of literature, that declares literature’s absence,’¹⁴² seemingly untroubled by the fact that these descriptions still occur to the characters surrounding them and are, therefore, motivated by the characters’ perception of those objects. In other words, that his own texts exist within the correlate.

Aware of this traumatising circularity, G.H. loses twice. She does not have the thing itself, and nor do she have things as they are to her in such a way that she can enable herself to navigate, as she used to, in a fluent and unquestioning way.

By integrating an objective reality into subjective experience, the subject can reflect upon the ‘structural coupling’¹⁴³ between itself and its world; it can reflect on the *meaning* that these interactions generate and use that meaning to structure future actions. What happens – an objective reality – influences how the subject feels about what happens, which influences what happens next. Detach from this and what results is a stasis, that compelling schematic momentarily arrested. G.H. recognises things – gravel, glass, iron – and understands the banality of this revelation, ‘Because the naked thing is so tedious.’ (*The Passion*, p. 145) This is a powerful and tragic reframing of Lispector’s earlier attempts at freedom. In earlier novels, G.H. seems to characterise a ‘pure’ and uncomplicated appreciation of things as a nearness to divinity:

Thus, a dog barking, silhouetted against the sky. It stood on its own, not requiring

¹⁴² *Bogue*, p. 159

¹⁴³ The term is from Maturana: ‘The relation between a living system and the medium in which it exists is a structural one in which living system and medium change together congruently as long as they remain in recurrent interactions. I have called this relation *structural coupling* [...]’ H. R. Maturana, ‘Autopoiesis, Structural Coupling and Cognition: A History of These and Other Notions in the Biology of Cognition’ in, *Cybernetics & Human Knowing*, Vol. 9, No. 3-4 (2002) pp. 5-34 p. 24

anything else to explain itself. An open door swinging to and fro. And suddenly, yes, there was the true thing. [...] To have a vision, the thing didn't have to be sad or happy or manifest itself. All it had to do was exist, preferably still and silent, in order to feel the mark in it.¹⁴⁴

This protagonist, Joanna, pays attention to things as they are *to her*, but does not allow, or simply does not acknowledge, that her perception of them transforms the objective reality to which they belong, and which such a passage seems to gesture towards. Instead, an objective reality leaves its 'mark', its uninterpreted nature representative of the same limitlessness G.H. seeks to attain, while, in these earlier novels, knowing an objective reality exists for itself imparts a spiritual, emotional, and psychological efficacy, almost exaltation. This attitude of Lispector's, one of near-mystical communion with the *in-itself*, without that communion being disturbed or despoiled by the philosophical paradoxes that preoccupy G.H., is reminiscent of Simone Weil:

Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter when there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void. Imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass.¹⁴⁵

'Imagination' can be read here as the self formulated as an answer to its own processes. When there is an answer, one assumes there is a question, and this represents the first proliferation of meaning, a proliferation which 'fills up all the fissures' and closes the subject off from reality as it is to itself. The 'silence' of an objective reality is drowned out by the inevitable interrogations of a self that knows itself as one, and that thereby transforms that silence into something it was not. As Lispector's earlier novels seem to implore, do not present what is presented to us in a manner that fuels the subjective structures of the self; instead, simply see things. *Be*, but do not allow this *being* to deform the reality its being-ness

¹⁴⁴ Clarice Lispector, *Near to the Wild Heart*, trans. by Johnny Lorenz (London: Penguin, 2012) (p.37)
Hereafter: Lispector, *Heart*

¹⁴⁵ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. by A. Wills (Lincoln: Bison Books, 1997) p. 55

distinguishes it from.

She had no history, Joanna suddenly realized. Because if things happened to her, they were not her and didn't mix with her true existence. The main thing- including past, present and future- was that she was alive. This was the backdrop of the narrative. At times this backdrop seemed faded, eyes closed, almost inexistent. But all it took was a tiny pause, a short silence, for it to loom up in the foreground, eyes open, a light, constant burbling like that of water between stones. Why describe more than that?¹⁴⁶

The Waste Book is in profound sympathy with this final question and although the novel is propelled by these ideas, Katherine is saved from G.H.'s sense of defeat as she lacks the metaphysical desire to detach entirely from her subjective experience; she, like Joanna, lacks a commitment to the fearsome impossibility at the heart of *The Passion*. Joanna's question, *why describe more than that?* could equally be attributed to Katherine.

Katherine can only experience things through the transformative prism of her own subjectivity, but the novel's unemotional prose seems to suggest that this transformation is not wholly distortive. This positions the novel as ideologically opposed to 'the internalisation of the external,'¹⁴⁷ a phrase Genevieve Lloyd uses to describe Proust's subjective rendering of the world, and which can stand as a characteristic feature of the Modernist novel more broadly. 'Things, as soon as we have perceived them, are transformed into something immaterial'¹⁴⁸, writes Lloyd, a near-perfect paraphrasing of Kant's formulation of the thing-in-itself and the impossibility of our knowing it. Proust's commitment to experience is positioned as a response to the limits of a realism, which 'captures only the half [of reality] which is "sheathed" in the object, ignoring the other half prolonged in ourselves that we alone can know.'¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ *Lispector, Heart* p. 67

¹⁴⁷ Genevieve Lloyd, *Being in Time: Selves and Narrators in Philosophy and Literature* (London: Routledge, 1993) p. 35 Hereafter, *Lloyd*

¹⁴⁸ *Lloyd* p. 140

¹⁴⁹ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past Volume III*, trans. by A Mayor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) p. 927

By presenting a fiction which ‘bends’ towards a subjectivity, the reader is encouraged to interpret what happens through the prism of how a focalising perspective experiences what happens. ‘The Uncle Charles Principle’, a term Kenner (1978) uses to describe Flaubert’s departure from omniscience to a subjective characterisation or description, is alive and well in *The Waste Book*, though the subjectivity towards which the prose ‘bends’ represents the very neutrality such ‘omniscience’ apparently demonstrates, while, at the same time, both omniscience and neutrality are unreservedly understood as impossible ambitions. Both the subjectification of the objective, and a commitment to things as they are, are equally fallacious. The first because it deforms reality; the second because it is impossible. Any claims to realism, to objectivity, are just subjectivism in disguise.

Dostoevsky offers as good an example of this technique as anyone else. Although the novel is narrated by a character who remains largely detached from events, the novel’s descriptions are routinely influenced by the subjectivity and psychological disposition of various characters. ‘There is no absolute authorial voice in *The Brothers Karamazov*,’ Pevear and Volokhonsky write,

Every scene is narrated from [...] some personal angle, and where the narrator seems effaced, we find that his voice has shaded into the equally distinct verbal element of the character he is describing.¹⁵⁰

For example, Mitya approaches his father’s window shortly before the patriarch’s murder, and the language reflects Mitya’s, not the narrator’s, psychology:

Mitya watched from the side and did not move. The whole of the old man’s profile, which he found so loathsome, the whole of his drooping Adam’s apple, his hooked nose smiling in sweet expectation, his lips – all was brightly lit from the left by the slanting light of the lamp shining from the room.¹⁵¹

As the novel’s English translators comment, ‘Not only the thoughts but even the

¹⁵⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (London: Vintage, 2004) p. xvi Hereafter, *Dostoevsky, Karamazov*

¹⁵¹ *Dostoevsky, Karamazov* p. 392

“style” of the passage [...] are Mitya’s. We suddenly hear him speaking through the narrator.’

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Lloyd suggests that the internalisation of an external reality is ‘a symbol of the hope for something that resists death.’¹⁵³ As though the meaninglessness of an objective reality becomes meaningful when it is interpreted by a subject, and this limits the emptiness of life, and acts as a psychological bulwark against death. Katherine, conversely, does not resist death; she ‘slacken[s] into something like acceptance or defeat, something like death but not death because she’s still here, sitting here, staring at nothing.’ (*TWB*, p. 265) In this way she ‘inhabits’ the meaninglessness of death while still alive and, therefore, is free from the fear of it. A paradoxical freedom, but a powerful one. Katherine *surrenders* to the limitlessness of an external reality, and it is no coincidence that the 12-Step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous (Bill W., 2006) emphasises the essential nature of surrender as the first step towards recovery. In this way, the novel’s final sequence, a sequence which, chronologically, precedes a timeline succeeding and interwoven with this one, represents the moment of her freedom from addiction, a freedom one can extrapolate as representative of her freedom from the self.

The novel’s spare prose style is therefore *both* a reflection of Katherine’s lack of emotional attachment to her own self concept, and an attempt to preserve an objective reality undistorted by the same psychological structures that would otherwise compose her identity. This of course begs the question: if Katherine is *not* the structures which scaffold her self concept, what *is* she? One could venture to suggest that this is a more penetrating question to ask of a reader than to compel a more superficial (because changeable and unstable) questioning of those psychological, interactive and intersubjective structures of meaning that

¹⁵² Dostoevsky, *Karamazov* p. xvi

¹⁵³ Lloyd p. 136

happen to scaffold a shifting self concept. Instead of asking, *who is she?* the novel encourages the reader to fully realise that, simply, *she is*.

Does one gesture – futilely – towards an inaccessible reality, or does one commit oneself to silence? Lispector's anguished conclusion asks the same question: '[...] how to speak to you, if there is a silence when I get it right? How to speak to you of the inexpressive?' (*The Passion*, p. 148) The elisions and ellipses of minimalist fiction seek to frame the outline of a subject, theme, or event rather than say it. A minimalist fiction suggests the writing 'must somehow frame the empty space carefully enough so that the reader has at least a faint chance of inferring from what has been given exactly what has been omitted.'¹⁵⁴

G.H. complicates this rationale by suggesting that there is no way of knowing how successfully one has 'framed' the core of the matter, as any analysis of that core undermines its status as ungraspable. The minimalist writer, along with Katherine and G.H., recognises that 'words are useless, for most things are unsayable.'¹⁵⁵ *TWB* was dogged by a similar, existential consideration. One cannot give the reader a 'pure reality'; one can only gesture towards it, and with every gesture one makes one reinforce the subjectivity that changes that reality into something it was not. Katherine's inability to relate to the novels she tries to read therefore serves as an admittance of the failure of the novel in which she exists: 'With every step they take, the novels move further from the truth. There is silence, she decides, and there is too much noise, and there is nothing in between.' (*TWB*, p. 80) This sentiment is in profound sympathy with Lispector's claim that,

[...] when art is good it is because it touched upon the inexpressive, the worst art is expressive, that art which transgresses the piece of iron and the piece of glass, and the smile, and the scream. (*G.H.*, p. 149)

¹⁵⁴ Cynthia J. Hallett, 'Minimalism and the Short Story' in, *Studies in Short Fiction*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Fall 1996) pp. 6-10 p. 6

¹⁵⁵ Robert C. Clark, *American Literary Minimalism* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2014) p. 8

Even in iterating the failure of art to maintain a ‘purity’ of experience, despoiling it by entering it back into the subjective perspective, the list of *things* achieves a sense of escalation, a panic, culminating in a scream, an expressive gesture that defeats the sentiment. Echoing these ideas, Katherine gets sober, clears her head, appreciates the astonishing *beingness* of things, and offers a quietly decisive and unanswerable challenge to the novel in which she exists:

The trees in the garden, the hands on the clock-face, her dull reflection in the burnished steel of the kettle: everything is so clearly itself and nothing else that it takes her breath away. What is there to say when everything is already so clearly itself? (*TWB*, p. 79)

Both Lispector’s novel and *The Waste Book* consistently emphasise an objective reality as being ‘truthful’ in a way that a subjective experience of that reality cannot be, and both novels place an undeniable sense of *value* on that truth, which makes its inaccessibility tragic. Katherine’s attitude throughout the novel rescues her from existential angst towards which G.H. inevitably leads. ‘‘You are free,’’ Katherine insists, ‘‘and you stay that way.’’ (*TWB*, p. 123)

The structures of the self, this essay suggests, mark the limitations of that freedom.

Conclusion

i. Summary

The thesis identified two overarching philosophical preoccupations motivating the creative project: a commitment to minimalist prose as a means to describe reality as it is to itself, and a concomitant commitment to presenting a character – Katherine Goss – who persistently detaches from the structures of the self.

The thesis maintained that these theoretical aims supported one another, with the novel's spare, unemotive prose a reflection of Katherine's psychological detachment, while simultaneously presenting reality as it is, undistorted by the subjectivity it reflects. This syllogistic reasoning is of course partially paradoxical, and the chapters persistently confronted and analysed these contradictions. *TWB* plays with, and is partly structured by, these philosophical considerations, but as chapter one of this thesis made explicit, the novel is not a theoretical treatise; the novel's philosophies are not presented with the kind of analytical rigor the accompanying critical thesis undertakes, and for that reason Katherine Goss, and the theoretical principles motivating her characterisation, remain ambiguous.

In clarifying Katherine's detachment from the self, the thesis presented a distinction between the self as an experiential, phenomenological entity and the self concept as the integration of that experience into broader structures of meaning. Disengaging from the phenomenology of the self is not possible; any successful detachment from selfhood is, in this sense, a dissolution of consciousness. If one ever achieved such a detachment, one could never know that one had, as the self who would remark upon it has been dissolved. This paradox sits at the heart of Lispector's *The Passion*, and the thesis therefore presented that novel's influence on *TWB* as a text that explicitly articulated the philosophies with which *TWB* is principally concerned. *The Passion* plays out, to its interrogative extreme, the process

of detaching from the self, and therefore provided a counterpoint to the writing of *TWB*, clarifying the borders of Katherine's detachment through a persistent comparison between the two texts. Katherine detaches from those broader structures of the self but holds back from attempting to dissolve the experiential self altogether. She is therefore rescued from the metaphysical pitfalls that frustrate G.H., and the thesis placed this relationship at the heart of its analysis of Katherine's detachment.

By positioning these ideas within an interdisciplinary context, drawing on philosophy of mind and the social sciences, the thesis clarified Katherine's detachment from the psychological structures of the self within a series of clear theoretical frameworks. Damasio's (1995, 2000) stages of the self, Metzinger's (2004, 2010, 2014) 'no self' hypotheses, and Gallagher's (2000) 'minimal self' were therefore supported by identity theory (Oyserman et al., 2012), which positions identity as the broader intersubjective structures of an originary *sense* of self. Without arguing for or against the empirical validity of these frameworks, the thesis used them as an analytical model and effectively attributed that model to Katherine, suggesting that this is the way Katherine intuitively structures her sense of self. This made sense of Katherine's persistent fascination with her being-ness over and above any urgent desire to integrate her experiential self into broader explanatory structures. In short, Katherine is satisfied with the strangeness of the fact that she exists; she sees no need to persistently integrate this realisation into broader orientating structures.

This insight was clarified through an analysis of Strawson's (2004, 2007) four-types schematic of the self, and allowed the thesis to position Katherine as a character who 'lack[s] any narrative tendency.'¹⁵⁶ Katherine's inferential and interpretive capacities – her narrative instinct – are intact, she just does not instinctively integrate her experiential selfhood into an

¹⁵⁶ Strawson, *Ethics* p. 86

ongoing narrative of the self. This allows Katherine to abstract herself from her past in a way that renders her response to past actions provocatively unconventional, and an analysis of the novel's violence sharpens these provocations. The thesis then considered the influence of Dostoevsky, and the way certain of his protagonists attempt to detach from the story of the self, only to transition into a new story of the self when an explanation of this detachment is demanded of them. Once again, the influence provided a counterpoint to Katherine. The frustrations of Raskolnikov and Stavrogin provided a blueprint for Katherine's own detachment and showed that accounting for the self leftover *after* detachment from that concept guarantees some version of the self as a story be reinstated. For this reason, Katherine persistently refuses to account for herself at all. She resists a therapeutic analysis of her past, and the thesis's consideration of psychological motivation as an unstable supposition, with reference to Doris (2014) and Wegner (2002), legitimised Katherine's wariness.

Throughout the thesis, *TWB*'s minimalist prose style was analysed as a means to present the world objectively; to present reality undistorted by a perceiving subject, and, again, an analysis of Lispector's influence provided grounding for this attempt. Lispector's earlier novels seem to believe in the possibility that even considering such a reality can result in a transcendence from the self, while *The Passion* finally acknowledges that even contemplating reality *as it is* renders that reality a correlate of our subjectivity, therefore undermining its transcendent status. Meillassoux's (2012, 2014) philosophical paradigm – correlationism – clarified this philosophical stance and led the thesis to conclude that *TWB*'s ambition to present reality in its objective nature is undermined by the attempt. Nevertheless, the novel's minimalism was motivated by a refusal to engage with the 'internalisation of the

external'¹⁵⁷ and therefore positioned the novel as a response against the modernist project and the postmodernisms that followed in its wake.

It was the job of the thesis, then, to identify the philosophical ambitions motivating the creative project and contextualise them within a series of interdisciplinary critical frameworks, before testing those ambitions against existing theoretical paradigms. The result of these investigations is that the novel, *TWB*, is clearly explicated in terms of its motivating ambitions, while the novels which most potently influenced the writing of *TWB* are incorporated into a critical context that, simultaneously, offers an original reading of those texts.

ii. Concluding Comments on the Critical Thesis

The limitations of the essay's thematic content is largely dictated by two factors. The first is a limited word count, and therefore little room to fully develop and explore the transdisciplinary contexts the chapters use in their analysis of the creative project. The second, and very much related, issue is the need to present a clear and streamlined proposition towards which each of the chapters must steer. Those propositions are presented as two motivating philosophical ambitions, and the chapters keep an analysis of them front and centre. Although chapter three begins with an ambitious precis of philosophical responses to Idealism, such overviews are necessarily brisk, and should be seen as glosses rather than comprehensive summaries.

The essay concentrates its discussion of literary influences on Dostoevsky and Lispector, with occasional reference to writers who otherwise influenced the creative project.

¹⁵⁷ Lloyd, p. 35

It almost goes without saying that the influences on *TWB* were far broader and more diffuse than the essay suggests. In service to a streamlined argument, many of these influences were side-lined or entirely excised from the final draft.

Chapter one considered *TWB*'s minimalism in a literary-historical context, before elucidating the first of this project's major aims – detachment from the self – and did so through theoretical frameworks developed across multiple fields of inquiry. Such a summary clearly explicates the ground covered in those relatively short sections and testifies to the necessary brevity with which they are dealt. Chapter two considered narrative theories of the self and the influence of Dostoevsky, whose work is briefly analysed in a subsection, before the thesis moved on to its discussion of Kantian Idealism and an attempt to describe reality *as it is*. Again, these discussions are brisk, though it is hoped that their summary nature is rich and interesting enough to support and perform the project's stated aims. Much research was, of course, excised from the final draft, though one hopes there is an impetus, consistency, and clarity of argument that nonetheless provides a satisfyingly unified analysis.

iii. Concluding Comments on the Creative Project

The Waste Book is a short, subtle novel. Subtle, in terms of its syntactic restraint, as well as in the treatment of its overarching philosophical principles. The accompanying critical thesis does the work of making those principles explicit, and thereby presents itself as a valuable accompaniment to the novel, but this means that, on its own, the novel's subtlety risks obscuring its own ambitions. Espousing a philosophical principle or giving characters overtly philosophical conversations about the nature of the self would be antithetical to a novel that wants, principally, to emphasise Katherine's beingness through a focus on *things*; a materialism that would be undermined by a persistent emphasis on theoretical debate or

conceptualisations. Further, were Katherine to explicitly articulate a philosophy of detachment from the structures of the self, she would inevitably be encouraged to talk or at least think about the self ‘left behind’, thereby reframing and reformulating a conception of the very self concept from which she purportedly detaches. This is the fate that dogs G.H. and the Dostoevsky protagonists considered in chapter two.

The Waste Book is, formally, a reasonably conventional novel, its only structural complexity – the interweaving of timelines – unchallenging and relatively commonplace. Once again, such an approach to form may seem to lack innovation or excitement, and the novel risks bearing out a warning cited in the thesis itself, namely that ‘fictional minimalism is characterised by a narrowness, paucity, and opaqueness of vision.’¹⁵⁸ Considering what it *isn’t* can be a useful way of clarifying what something is, and *TWB* is not a stylistically challenging, formally innovative or syntactically ambitious novel. It is, instead, a short, focussed, pared-down presentation of a young woman whose psychological detachment is clarified by a prose style of comparable restraint; a novel that, despite the reserved nature of its language, attains to a psychological freedom that is both inspiring and disturbing in equal measure.

I would like to finally conclude the thesis with a few further reflections on the novel. These reflections are contained within a postscript, as they depart tonally from the body of the thesis proper.

¹⁵⁸ Dunn, p. 54

iv. Reflective Postscript

With *The Waste Book* I wanted to write a novel in which Katherine's beingness was front and centre of the text; which refused to engage with the principles and structures of a psychologically motivated fiction, but I wanted to do so within a narrative that was carefully plotted. I hoped that the *what happens* aspect of the text would jar against Katherine's refusal to engage psychologically with it, and that this would reinforce Katherine's detachment, encourage the reader to see, feel, and appreciate her *as she is*, that is, as a person, as existing. I wanted this to be as persistently striking and strange a fact for the reader as it was for me. I could not get over the strange and strangely destabilising realisation that I exist, and I wanted to present that to the reader through a careful prose that was stripped-down, minimalist, and elliptically poetic.

In the end, I feel the novel misses the mark on a number of technical levels. I am not entirely satisfied with the novel's plotting, and although the final chapter introduces a satisfying circularity, I find part three ultimately weak. The novel, in a way, sets up these failures; they are built into it by the ambitions I spoke of earlier. Kyle's confession (part two, chapter six) that it was Joe who told Katherine's father about her part in the attack; Joe's death and the fact that Katherine supplied Kyle with an alibi for his murder: these revelations are so oblique, there is such little fuss made over them, that they are easy to miss altogether, and I remain ambivalent about these decisions. On the one hand, there is something satisfying about taking moments which might otherwise be front and centre of the drama and skirting over them in such an off-hand manner. Such a technique surely demonstrates the detachment analysed in the critical thesis. On the other hand, if the novel refuses to give these moments any prominence, and Katherine largely shrugs them off and detaches from their emotional impact, then why would the reader care either? And if I *want* the reader to care, if I really want to craft an emotionally affecting narrative full of psychological twists and revelations,

then I am forsaking my stated ambitions, which insists that detaching from story altogether is – spiritually, emotionally – preferable to engaging with the drama of the novel.

There needs to be a strong and satisfying narrative in order to bring Katherine's detachment from it into sharp relief, but I am not always convinced that undermining the impetus of the narrative yields a satisfying enough reading experience to warrant the effort. Rewriting or redrafting the chapters could not eradicate that central tension; it was built into the very rationale of the novel itself. If the plot is persistently undermined by Katherine's detachment from it, then it is no surprise that the energy and conviction that goes into the novel's plotting is left lacking. I confronted an indecisiveness in myself that was never finally resolved one way or the other.

As mentioned in the above, formal conclusion, although I don't want to explicitly adumbrate the novel's motivating philosophical preoccupations within the novel itself, without allowing myself to be explicit about them they risk being obscured altogether, and the critical thesis occasionally risks, in turn, over-egging the pudding; emphasising a vigorous philosophical motivation that is only very obliquely evident in the text I'm analysing.

Despite these reservations and hesitations, whenever I revisit *The Waste Book* I am pleased by the writing. The language is clear and precise, and has moments of satisfying, careful poetry and I am, in the end, pleased that the novel was driven by real conviction. The novel represents not just 'a story I wanted to tell', but a belief about the power of fiction to bring existence into sharp and disorientating focus, and it was a fascinating attempt at long-form fiction. Even if the novel falters at the level of plot, I am pleased, at least, that Katherine is a thoughtfully crafted and distinctive protagonist.

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